Guitar & BASS MAGAZINE

Awards 2010

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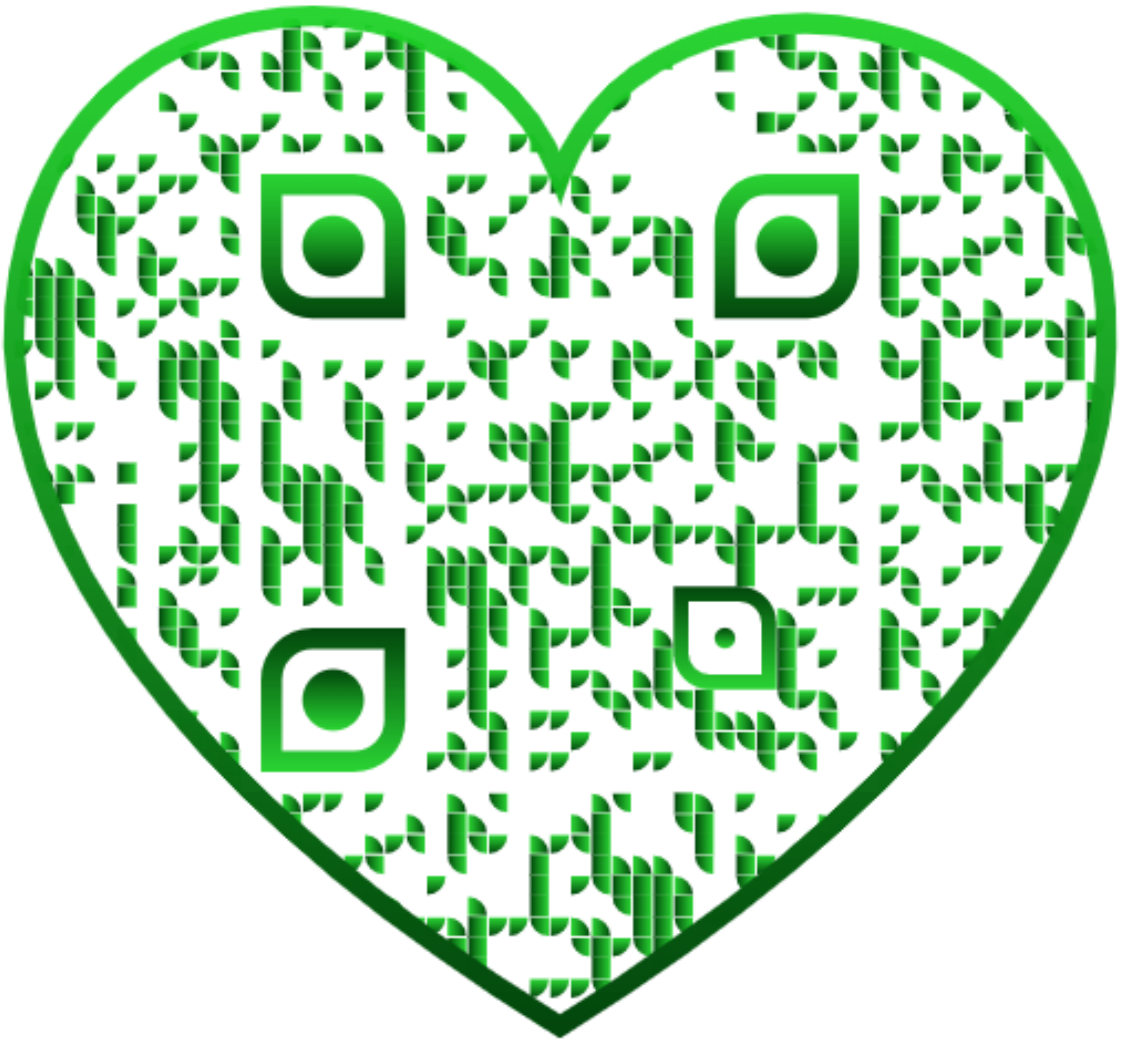

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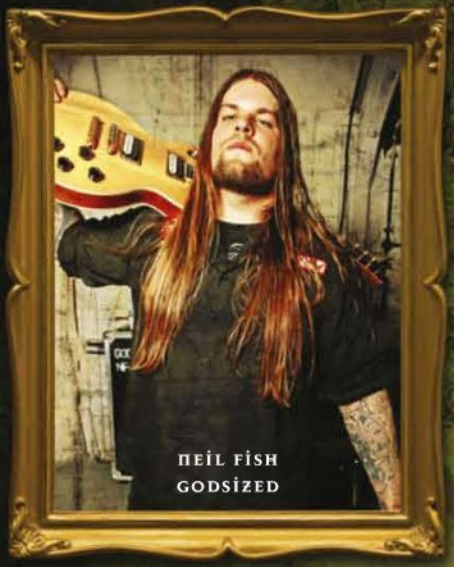
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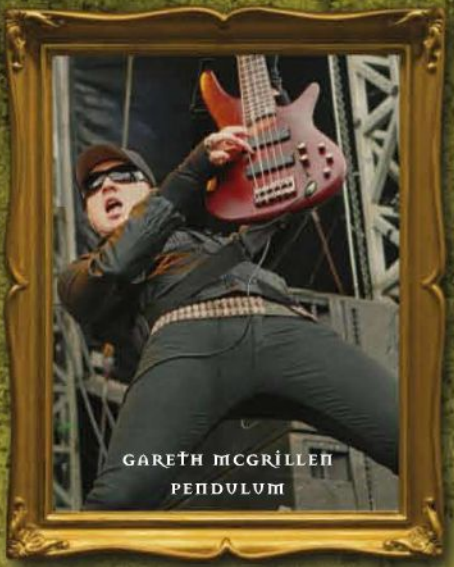
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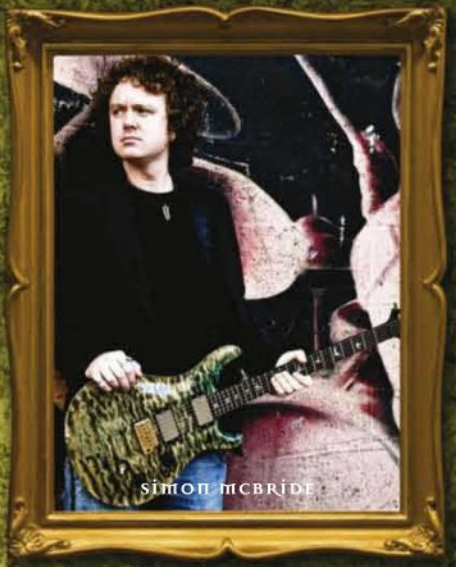
PENDULUM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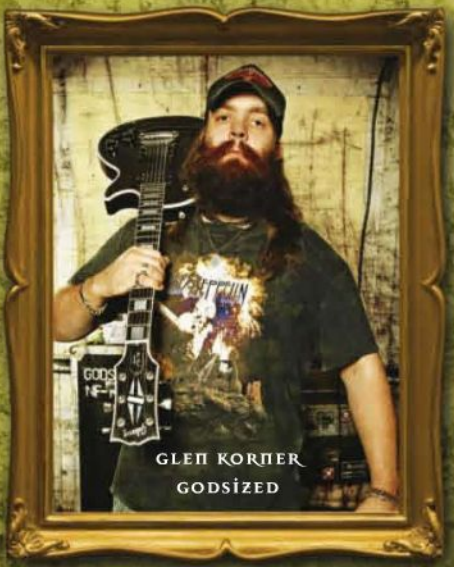
PONTUS NORGREN
HAMMERFALL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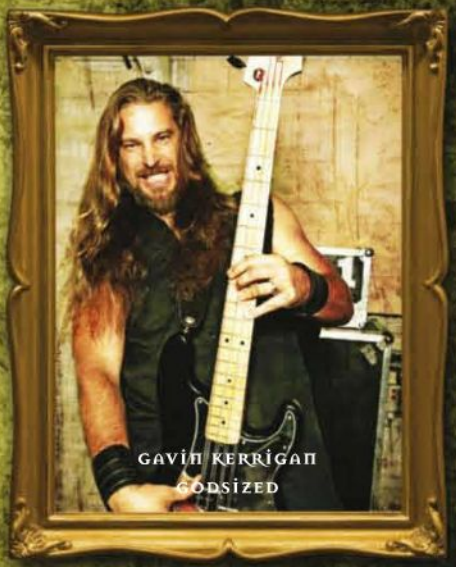
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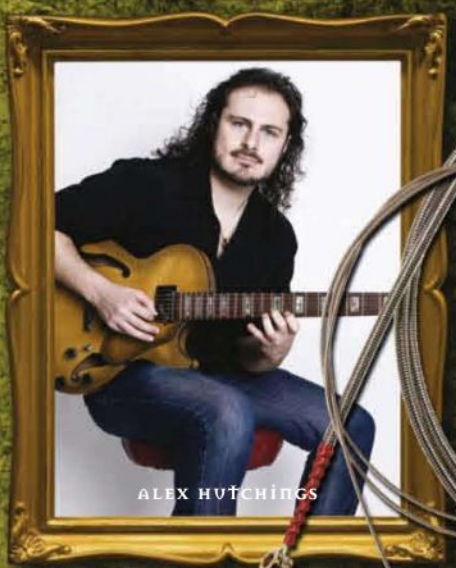
GUTHRIE GOVAN


ALEX HUTCHINGS

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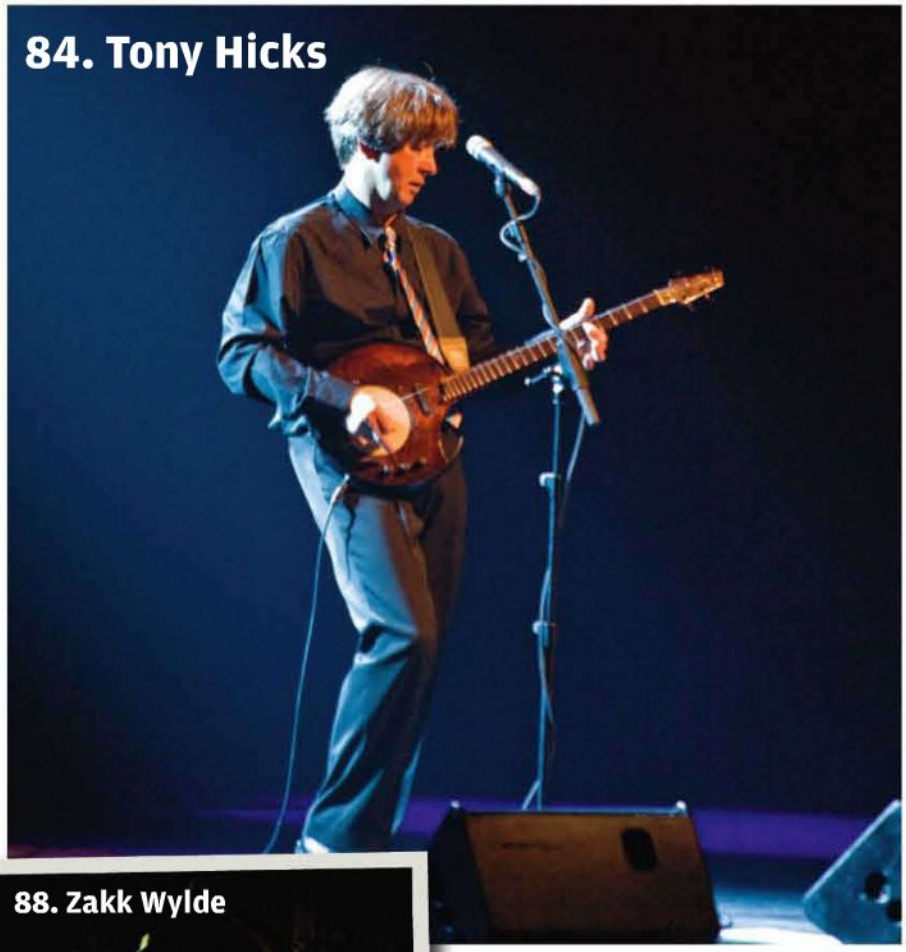

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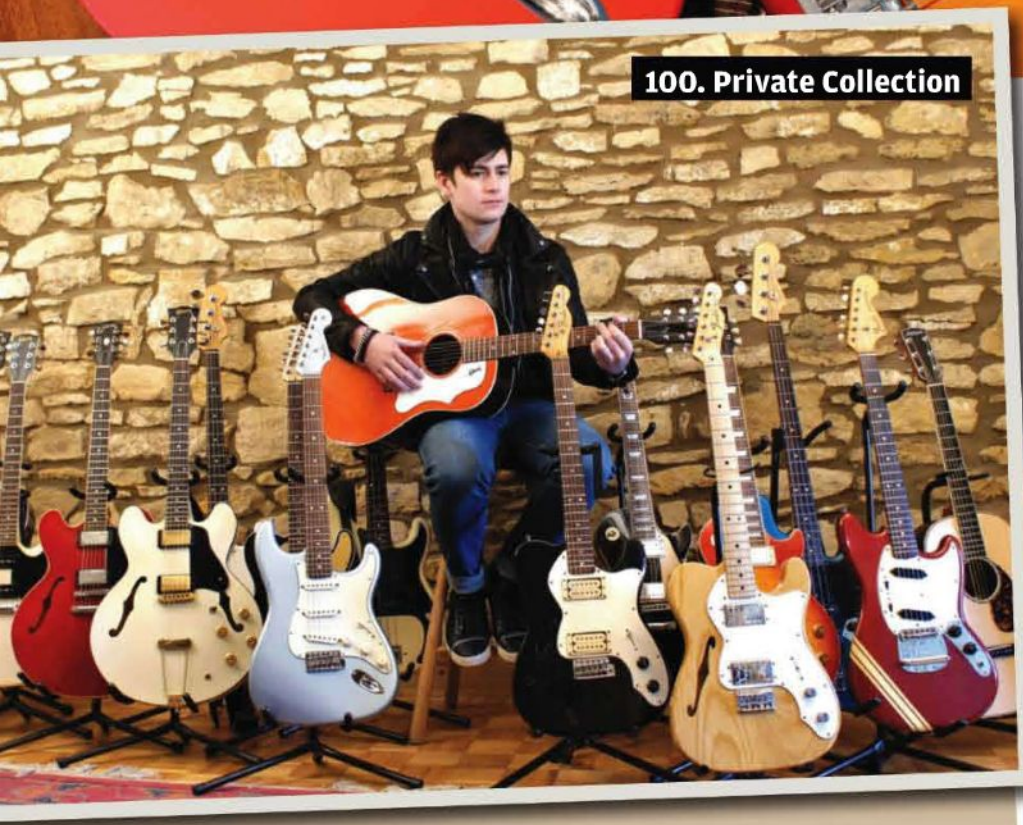

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Subscribe & Save 38%

See Page 144 for details

Woke Up This Mornin'

News

A Rhoads Less Travelled

Credit: Jay Banbury/Neil Zlozower

He's a guitar icon loved by anyone worth their salt in the world of metal; hell, Zakk Wylde has even got a shrine dedicated to the man... but picture Randy Rhoads and the abiding image is of him playing his trademark polka-dot Flying V atop Ozzy Osbourne's shoulders.

However, Rhoads learnt his chops on an entirely different instrument altogether, and it was on his 1974 Les Paul that Rhoads auditioned and scored the career-changing job as Osbourne's right-hand man. This month the Gibson Custom Shop pays tribute to the man and his guitar with the release of the Randy Rhoads Les Paul Custom, an exact replica of that very axe, and to ensure absolute quality they've even enlisted the help of the Rhoads family to reproduce the precise colouring of this historic six-string.

Specs include Rhoads' favoured 'small D profile' neck, a three-piece figured maple top, a three-piece mahogany/maple/mahogany body, a special off-white nitro finish, mother-of-pearl block position markers, 22 medium-jumbo frets, a Tun-O-Matic bridge and stopbar tailpiece, Gibson Custom Super '74 humbuckers, gold Schaller GP straplocks and gold Schaller M6 tuners.

The first 100 guitars will be hand-aged to mirror the dings and scratches of the original and 200 will receive Gibson's VOS treatment. Owing to the limited numbers, anyone desperate to add one of these guitars to their collection will have to move faster than a crazy train to snag one, but it could be worth it... this might be one of our favourite Gibson signatures to date. For more details and all the specs, visit www.gibson.com.

Jackson Five

Speed demons unite! As part of its 30th anniversary festivities Jackson has unleashed the sleek new JS series. There are five spanking new models, all based on time-honoured Jackson classics: the Rhoads, the Warrior, the Dinky, the Kelly and the King V. The JS3 guitars feature Jackson's new shred-friendly compound-radius 24-fret fingerboard with sharkfin inlays and two high-output humbuckers that supply the ear-bothering metal power. All are fitted with double-locking Floyd Rose vibrato systems for those all-important divebombs. Wannabe headbangers will also be relieved to hear that they can get their hands on one for a mere £363, while the Dinky costs just £339... heavy on the metal, light on the wallet. See www.jackson.com for all the juicy details.

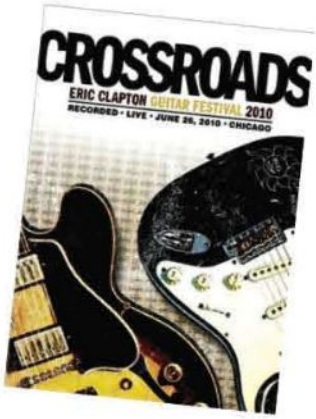
Re-Touching Bass

Bassists looking for a versatile amp could do worse than to check out the new TC Electronics BH500. Aside from the regular features, there are several unique additions; SpectraComp, a compressor that essentially separates the strings, allowing different frequencies to be treated independently; TubeTone, which recreates the sound of a tube amp; and TweeterTone, which controls high frequency. Tweaking complete, your sounds can be stored in three presets, and there's a built-in tuner and an auxiliary input for playing along to your fave tracks. Pair it up with a BC cab and you'll be slap happy. See www.tcelectronic.com.

Another Bass In The Haul

Hot off Fender's production line this month is the new Roger Waters Signature Precision bass. It's a tall, dark and handsome affair with a black finish and matching pickguard, while a black chrome bridge and strap buttons, black knurled volume and tone knobs, a brass nut, '70s-style Fender-stamped open-gear chrome tuners and a gasketed F-stamped neck plate maintain the understated aesthetic. Designed to reflect the Pink Floyd man's personal four-string, it's fitted with Seymour Duncan's high output SPB-3 Quarter Pounder split-coil pickup providing simple yet effective low end at an equally low-end price. It'll be perfect for those who like to let their basslines do the talking. The price is £692; see www.fender.com for more.

At The Crossroads



The Crossroads Festival is always a magnet for guitar heroes, and 2010's event in Illinois was no different, with Steve Winwood, Jeff Beck, Jimmie Vaughan, Sonny Landreth and Joe Bonamassa all asked to join the fray by curator Eric Clapton. Those who missed out on the action will be thrilled to hear that Rhino are releasing a two-disc DVD/Blu-ray with four hours and 40 tracks worth of six-string magic. A sneak preview is available online at www.rhino.com, and it's out on 8 November.

Solar Flair

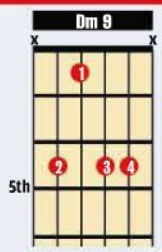
Tascam has an eco-friendly new gizmo that will keep you in tune with the planet as well as your band - the world's first solar-powered chromatic tuner. The TC-1S charges its battery via a small row of solar cells on the front panel, but night-lovers needn't worry... it also charges via the USB input. It comes complete with a built-in microphone, four display modes (Bar, Fine, Strobe Animation and Needle), a protective silicone cover and a handy strap and clip, and is available in six vibrant colours. Now all we need is some sun. More details at www.tascam.com.

British Folk

In 1936 Billy Butlins chose Skegness as the ideal place to open his first resort. Now this bastion of British holidaymaking will host the Great British Folk Festival. The line-up is a generation-spanning treat, with Donovan, Sandi Thom and Gordon Giltrap. On top of the roomy venues there's plenty of restaurants and bars, and revellers will only be a stone's throw from Skeggy's sandy beaches. Dates are 3-5 December; tickets start at £69 (inc. accommodation), see www.bigweekends.com/folk or call 0845 070 4734.

The Lost Chord

This voicing of Dm9 uses all four fingers of the fretting hand and no open strings, so you can move it up and down the fretboard at will. Try it fingerstyle, with a *Girl From Ipanema*-style alternating bass pattern. It's a lovely, moody chord... just right for those late night bossa nova sessions.



WIN THIS GUITAR

We're always trying our best to bring you the finest the guitar world has to offer, but there's always room for improvement... so we've decided it's high time we put the feelers out. Whether it's luxury Les Pauls or bedroom bargains, in-depth interviews or testing tutorials, we want to know what elements of *Guitar & Bass* magazine really get your juices flowing. Of course, it would be ungentlemanly not to offer something in return, so we've managed to commandeer a stunning bounty in the shape of an ESP Phoenix 200. Resplendent in sleek black and armed with ESP pickups, it's certain to become your go-to guitar. The lengths we go to in the name of perfection... To get involved visit www.anthem-publishing.com/surveys and fill in the short questionnaire.

WWW.ANTHEM-PUBLISHING.COM/SURVEYS

In Brief

Save The 100 Club

London's 100 Club has hosted everyone from Howlin' Wolf to Oasis, so it's unsurprising that talk of an imminent closure has led to a fervent campaign to save this legendary nightspot. New blues torchbearer Stephen Dale Petit is leading the pack and has invited Ronnie Wood and Mick Taylor, among others, to help out at a benefit show on December 1 to raise cash for the ailing venue. Tickets cost £35 (adv.) £38 (door); go to www.savethe100club.co.uk for all the information.

The Who Live At Leeds

You'd think one of the best live albums ever made couldn't be improved upon - but you'd be wrong. The Who always preferred their Hull show, but a technical glitch meant Entwistle's bass was absent from the mix. Now they've patched it up and are releasing both the Leeds and Hull show in a 40th Anniversary Edition. The package includes a hardback book with photos and memorabilia, the original vinyl album, a seven-inch single of *Summertime Blues* and a poster, all housed in a collector's box. It'll be released on November 15.

Rotosound Bronze

First introduced in 1974 and nicknamed 'Country Golds', Rotosound's Super Bronze strings feature James How's innovative 'contact core' which centred around the string's core resting on the guitar's saddle for claimed improved sustain, increased volume and brighter tone. Now, they're reinstating the strings using new, improved techniques. Zip along to www.rotosound.com for the whole story.

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4 String Bass Guitars In Stock

For full details, enter number into the SKU search on the website

8090	Fender Road Worn 60s Jazz in 3 Colour Sunburst
8244	Fender Original 1973 USA Precision in Sunburst
8243	Fender Original 1969 USA Jazz in Sunburst
8297	Fender Geddy Lee Signature Jazz in Sunburst
8459	Fender 62 American Vintage Precision in Sunburst
7795	Fender Highway 1 USA Jazz in Wine Transparent
8690	Fender Standard Precision in Candy Apple Red
8145	Fender Standard Mexican Jazz in Blue
8721	Fender Standard Jazz in Sunburst
8071	Fender 70s Jazz in Black
8157	Duesenberg Starplayer in Trans Orange
8156	Duesenberg Starplayer in Black
7583	Warwick Corvette Standard 4 in Natural Oil
8716	Warwick Thumb 4 Bolt On in Natural
8741	Warwick Corvette $$ Ltd Edition 2010
8833	Warwick Pro Series Corvette in Natural
8623	MusicMan Stingray 3EQ in True Gold
8781	MusicMan Stingray 2EQ in Blue Pearl
8779	MusicMan Stingray 2EQ in Black
8780	MusicMan Stingray 2EQ in Candy Red
7573	Lakland 4402 in Sunburst
8022	Lakland Skyline Bob Glaub Sig in Sunburst
8023	Lakland 4401 in Black
7570	Lakland Darryl Jones Signature in Blue
6704	Yamaha BB714BS Billy Sheehan Signature
8448	Yamaha RBX374 in Metallic Red
3667	Westcoast BG2 in Natural or See Through Red
3669	Westcoast BG4 Neck Thru Body in Brown Stain
3668	Westcoast BG3 in Natural
3665	Westcoast MMB4 in Candy Apple Red or Blue
6461	Squier Vintage Modified Fretless Jazz Sunburst
8704	Squier Classic Vibe 60s Precision in Fiesta Red
8251	Squier James Johnston Sig Model Jazz in Blue
7680	Squier Vintage Modified 70s Jazz Bass in Natural
8583	Spector Euro LX4 in Natural
8019	Rockbass Fortress 4 in Blue
7623	Rockbass Streamer Standard In Blue Stain
5873	Peavey Cirrus Series, BXP, Redwood, Bolt-On
5527	Levin LB400 in Blue
2701	Levin LB100J in Trans Red
2702	Levin LB200 in Cherry Sunburst
559	Levin LB400 in Red
8258	Levin LB100J in Antique Sunburst
8724	Levin LB100P in Black
7912	FleaBass Wild One Junior in Black
8264	FleaBass Model 32 Pro Punk in Green
7911	FleaBass Pro Water In Blue
8128	Epiphone Thunderbird IV in Vintage Sunburst
8129	Epiphone Viola in Vintage Sunburst
8065	Epiphone Thunderbird Pro IV in Black
8261	Dean Jeff Berlin Signature in Brazilia Burst
8273	Bass Collection Jive Bass in Purple Haze
5721	Bass Collection SP4 in Natural Yellow

5 String Bass Guitars In Stock

7193	Marleaux Votan 5 in Black
8574	Marleaux Consat Straight 5 in Bordeaux
6526	Marleaux M Bass Custom 5 in Maple & Walnut
8711	Marleaux Consat Custom 5 in Natural Satin
6951	Marleaux Consat Custom 5 Fretless in Pearwood
8619	Overwater J-Series Deluxe in Black
8710	Overwater J Series Deluxe in Quilted Trans Red
7526	Overwater Perception Standard Deluxe in Koa
5497	Overwater Perception Standard Deluxe in Bubinga
8395	MusicMan Stingray 3EQ in Black Finish
8017	Peavey USA Cirrus in Natural
8015	Yamaha BBNEII Nathan East Sig in Black
5741	Yamaha BB615 in Yellow Natural Satin
8458	Yamaha BB415 in Red Burst
8354	Yamaha BB415 in Trans Orange
8506	Yamaha BB2005 in Natural
3664	Westcoast JB5 in sunburst and amber
5876	Warwick Streamer LX5 in Emerald Green
8728	Warwick Rockbass Corvette Basic Active in Black
8018	Rockbass Vampyre 5 in Black
8020	Rockbass Streamer LX5 in Black
8016	Peavey Cirrus in Natural
8262	MTD Kingston Heir in Trans Cherry
7571	Lakland 5501 in 3 Colour Sunburst
8608	Ibanez BTB475 in Royal Blue
8689	Fender Deluxe Jazz Bass in Burnt Orange
8015	Yamaha BBNEII Nathan East Sig in Black
3670	Westcoast BG5 Fretless in Natural

6 String Bass Guitar In Stock

6967	Overwater Perception Std Deluxe in Claro Walnut

4 String Acoustic Basses In Stock

7384	Levin LAB150 in Black
7383	Levin LAB150 in Natural
7385	Levin LAB150 in Vintage Sunburst
556	Levin LB100 in Sunburst
6871	Breedlove ABJ250/SM4
8621	Breedlove Atlas Series Stage BJ350/CR4

Bass Combos

7145	Mark Bass Mini CMD151P Combo (400w, 1x15)
7144	Mark Bass CMD121H Combo (400w, 1x12)
4820	Mark Bass Mini CMD121P Combo (400w, 1x12)
6587	Gallien Kruger 700RB 115 Combo (320w, 1x15)
6586	Gallien Kruger MB150S Combo (150w, 1x12)
8658	Gallien Kruger BL112 Combo (100w, 1x12)
8659	Gallien Kruger BL115 Combo (115w, 1x15)
8657	Gallien Kruger BL110 Combo (70w, 1x10)
8119	Ashdown 550 Touring Combo (550w, 2x10)
5114	Ashdown Klystron C115-500 Combo (575w, 1x15)
3627	Ashdown MAG C115-300 Evo2 Combo (300w, 1x15)
704	Ashdown ABM C115 500 Evo III (575w, 1x15)
6617	Ashdown After Eight Combo (15w, 1x8)
6618	Ashdown Perfect Ten Combo (30w, 1x10)
6619	Ashdown Five Fifteen Combo (100w, 1x15)
8114	Ashdown AL D600 C210 Combo (575w, 2x10)
3614	Ashdown ABM C210T-500 Evo3 Combo (575w, 2x10)
3629	Ashdown MAG C410T-300 Evo2 Combo (300w, 4x10)
6581	Ashdown AL MK500 Bass Combo (575w, 2x10)
6616	Ashdown EB180 15 Evo2 Combo (180w, 1x15)
8122	Ashdown 515 Mini Stack (100w, 2x10)
6615	Ashdown EB180 12 Evo2 Combo (180w, 1x12)
7528	Fender B-DEC 30 Combo (30w, 1x10)
8638	Fender Rumble 75 Combo (75w, 1x12)
7772	Orange Crush PiX 50BXT Combo (50w, 1x12)
7773	Orange Crush PiX 100BXT Combo (100w, 1x15)
650	Marshall MB150 Combo (150w, 1x15)
6629	Marshall MB4410 Combo (450 Watt, 4x10)
7259	Marshall MB4210 Combo (450w, 2x10)
6733	AER Amp One Combo (200w, 1x10)
8362	AER Amp Two Combo (240w, 1x12)
6598	Roland Microcube Bass RX Combo (4x4)

Bass Heads

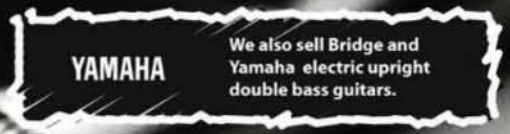
7495	Orange Terror Bass 500 Head (500w)
7579	Warwick Sonic II Head (200w)
7920	TC Electronic RH450 Head (450w)
7921	TC Electronic Classic 450 Head (450w)
5862	Peavey Tour VB2 Tube Head (225w)
5860	Peavey Tour 450 Head (450w)
5868	Peavey Pro VB3 Tube Head (300w)
4656	Orange AD200B MK3 Tube Head (200w)
7258	Marshall 1992LEM Tube Head (100w)
2752	Marshall VBA400 Tube Head (400w)
4814	Mark Bass SD800 Digital Head (750w)
7759	Mark Bass SD1200 Digital Head (1200w)
6605	Mark Bass F1 Head (500w)
6603	Mark Bass TA501 Head (500w)
4812	Mark Bass SA450 Bass Head (500w)
7758	Mark Bass Little Mark Tube Head (800w)
7756	Mark Bass Little Mark Tube Head (500w)
4813	Mark Bass Little Mark II Head (500w)
6604	Mark Bass Little Mark 250 Head (250w)
7137	Mark Bass TA503 Head (500w)
6602	Mark Bass LMK Bass Head (500w)
7755	Mark Bass Little Mark III Head (500w)
7068	Line6 LowDown HD750 Head (750w)
6584	Gallien Kruger BL600 Head (300w)
8584	Gallien Kruger MB2 Head (500w)
8822	Gallien Kruger Goldline 500 Head (500w)
3626	Ashdown MAG300H Evo2 Head (300w)
695	Ashdown ABM900 EVO III Head (2x575w)
8116	Ashdown 427 Small Block Head (427w)
8117	Ashdown BTA300 Head (300w)
8471	Ashdown Little Bastard 30 Head (30w)
8644	Ashdown Gold Plate 30th Anni Mark King
5123	Ashdown AL MK500 Head (575w)
8120	Ashdown 550 Spyder Head (550w)
7536	Ashdown BTA400 Bass Head (400w)
8118	Ashdown BTA200 Bass Head (200w)
4739	Ashdown ABM500RC Evo III Head (575w)
6611	Ashdown Little Giant 350 Head (350w)
696	Ashdown ABM500 EVO III Head (575w)

Bass Cabinets

7923	TC Electronic RS212 Cab (2x12)
7922	TC Electronic RS210 Cab (2x10)
7924	TC Electronic RS410 Cab (4x10)
668	Peavey 410TVX Cab (4x10)
5865	Peavey Tour 410 Cab (4x10)
674	Peavey PRO210 Cab (2x10)
8712	Peavey PRO410 Cab (4x10)
5866	Peavey Tour 215 Cab (2x15)
7764	Orange SP212 Cab (2x12)
7763	Orange SP210 Cab (2x10)
7765	Orange SP410 Cab (4x10)
7761	Orange OBC810 Cab (8x10)
4658	Orange OBC115 Cab (1x15)
4657	Orange OBC410H Cab (4x10)
6637	Marshall MBC115 Cab (1x15)
6638	Marshall MBC410 Cab (4x10)
2753	Marshall VBC810 Cab (8x10)
652	Marshall VBC412 Cab (4x12)
6639	Marshall MBC810 Cab (8x10)
7267	Mark Bass Classic 152 Cab (2x15)
4819	Mark Bass STD106HF Cab (6x10)
7140	Mark Bass STD152HR Cab (2x15)
4816	Mark Bass STD104HF Cab (4x10)
7142	Mark Bass STD104HR Cab (4x10)
4818	Mark Bass STD102HF Cab (2x10)
7265	Mark Bass NY804 Cab (4x8)
7141	Mark Bass STD151HR Cab (1x15)
8647	Mark Bass New York 804 Cab (4x8)
7266	Mark Bass NY121 Cab (1x12)
6607	Mark Bass Traveler Series
7432	Line6 LowDown 410 Cab (4x10)
6585	Gallien Kruger 410BLX Cab (4x10)
6608	Ashdown NEO 2104H Compact Cab (2x10)
3615	Ashdown ABM210T Evo3 Cab (2x12)
3620	Ashdown ABM410T Cab (4x10)
3619	Ashdown ABM115 Cab (1x15)
8577	Ashdown LB212 Cab (2x12)
6599	Ashdown ABM810 Cab (8x10)
4737	Ashdown Mag 810 Deep Cab (8x10)
3632	Ashdown MAG410T Deep Cab (4x10)
3630	Ashdown MAG115 Deep Cab (1x15)
8032	Ashdown USA 115 Large Cab (1x15)
8124	Ashdown LB 212 Cab (2x12)
5118	Ashdown NEO 115H Comp Cab (1x15)
8033	Ashdown USA 410H Cab (4x10)
8034	Ashdown USA 414H Cab (4x10)
8035	Ashdown USA 610 Cab (6x10)
8036	Ashdown USA 810 Cab (8x10)
5117	Ashdown Klystron NEO 210 Cab (2x10)

Electric Upright Double Basses

8043	NS Design NXT 4 String
5250	NS Design CR4 4 String Bass
5251	NS Design WAV Series 4 String



Bass Effects

4524	Tascam CDBT2 (Bass Phrase Trainer)
6777	Tascam MPBT1
3326	Roland VBASS Bass Processor
5671	Line6 Bass Floor POD
5672	Line6 Bass PODxt Live
4323	Electro Harmonix Bassballs USA
8478	Digitech BP80 Bass Mulit-Effects
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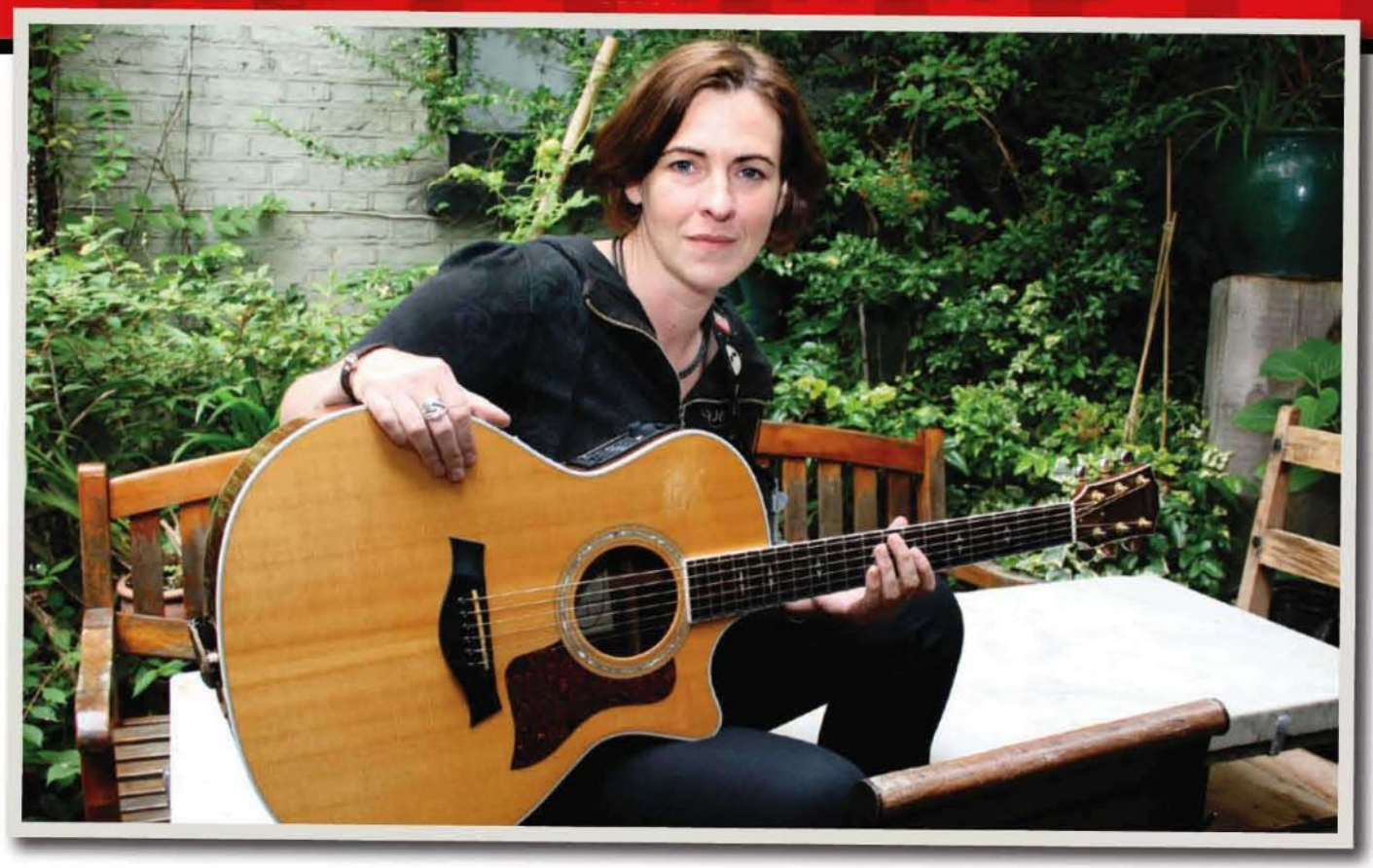
5794	Boss ODB3 Bass Overdrive
5804	Ashdown DRIVE (Overdrive Plus)
5807	Ashdown Envelope Filter
5806	Ashdown Chorus Plus

Woke Up This Mornin'...

Treasured Possessions



If you're flying around the world playing your songs for a living then you need a guitar that sounds great every night. Just don't get it blown up

Eleanor McEvoy

Celebrates The Endurance Of Her

Taylor 814CE

After experimental dalliances with Takamines and a Godin, Eleanor McEvoy found true electro-acoustic bliss with her plush Taylor Auditorium. It wasn't a decision that the lauded Irish songwriter took lightly. She spent a whole fortnight returning to the same shop to immerse herself in all the acoustic guitars on display.

'I had decided I wanted a Martin, but I was after a gigging guitar and the most important thing to me was that it would sound great plugged in,' McEvoy confirms. 'Every day I went along and tried all the Martins, which I loved... until I plugged them in. I took down the Taylor last of all because it was the most expensive acoustic in the shop. I tried it and straight away I knew it was the one - but I thought it cost just too much.'

'It was the most expensive acoustic in the shop. I gritted my teeth and put down the credit card'

It took a full two weeks before she finally accepted that it had to be the Taylor. 'I gritted my teeth and put down the credit card. I love it, though. It's a beautiful instrument.'

You won't find Eleanor handling her guitar with kid gloves; it's a working tool. She likes to bash out a rhythm on the body at live shows, which has led to a little extra wear and tear.

'There's only a slight bit of marking, but it's a good body for beating,' she beams. 'It's got some lovely tones - you can really find which bits of it are funky to play.'

As Eleanor regularly criss-crosses the globe with the Taylor, a more serious danger is airline mistreatment. 'You should see the state of my case,' she sighs. 'It's been smashed on so many occasions. I went through four cases in 2008.'

Miraculously, the 814C has just one small hairline crack to show for all this rough handling, but things could have been a lot worse. Back in 2002, at the Europa hotel in Belfast, Eleanor assumed she'd left the guitar in the safekeeping of her tour manager and went off in search of caffeine. It was nearly the last time she saw it.

'There was bit of a commotion,' she laughs. 'I thought it was probably a bomb scare, but in those days in Belfast that was still a daily occurrence, so you didn't bat an eyelid. Somebody came into the coffee shop to ask if anybody had left a case lying around, but it never occurred to me that they meant a guitar case.' A few minutes later she overheard somebody say that the suspicious object closely resembled a guitar, and the alarm bells started ringing.

'By that time the bomb squad were there, the whole area was sealed off, and they were just about to do the controlled explosion! I had to run over and tap one of the security people on the shoulder and say "Erm, excuse me... see that? It's mine." It was a near thing! You would never worry about your case getting stolen at the Europa, but it happens to be one of the most regularly bombed hotels in the world.'

info

LATEST ALBUM: I'D RATHER GO BLONDE

Wonderfully crafted songs with wit and character; check out Eleanor's *What's Following Me?* album for extra six-string action

MORE INFO:

www.eleanormcevoy.com or www.taylorguitars.com

Woke Up This Mornin'...

Soundtrack Of My Life

Steve Lukather

The ex-Toto axe-slinger talks us through the pivotal albums which shaped his playing style and still inspire him today

'Toto is done,' insists Steve Lukather. 'I'm taking the solo thing very seriously. It's my whole life.' After 20 years as the lynchpin of one of the USA's biggest-selling acts, and as an unsung sessionman on countless hits, Steve's now focusing totally on his own output. Not unlike a lyric from many an old blues tune, Lukather's mother was told by a mystic her unborn son would be a famous musician... and he didn't let her down. By the age of nine, young Steve was amazing the folks in the neighbourhood with his incredible untutored chops. Even jazz fusion trailblazer Larry Carlton was bowled over, and made Steve his protégé. Toto was soon formed, and millions of records flew off the shelves. You can catch Lukather playing intimate dates across the country during November; see www.stevelukather.net for details.

This album was the reason I started playing guitar...

The Beatles

Meet The Beatles

Younger people don't understand the impact of the Beatles. They changed everything. I saw them on the TV when I was seven years old, and got so excited my family bought me a guitar and a copy of this LP. I wore the record out about 10 times over. No one believes this, but without any instruction the shapes of the open chords just came to me, and I could play. I was a freak show!

The most outrageous music I'd ever heard in my life...

Jimi Hendrix Experience

Are You Experienced

Octave dividers, wahs - it may as well have been music from Mars. People already thought I was weird for a 10-year old, but when I figured out the chords to *Purple Haze* and got hold of a wah and a fuzztone, man... they couldn't believe what they were seeing. I started playing live when I was still in single digits! I was nine, playing with kids of 13. The guitar dwarfed me.

Real tasty guitar and sonically beautiful compositions...

Pink Floyd

Dark Side Of The Moon

David Gilmour is an old friend and one of my favourite-ever guitar players. I love the guy, he's one of the nicest men alive. This is a brilliantly thought-out album top to bottom, but the solo on *Breathe* just kills me. As a kid I remember trying to sneak into the Hollywood Bowl to see the *Dark Side Of The Moon* tour, and they put the dogs on us. We had to run into the hills.

The guy can just play one note and it sings...

Jeff Beck

Jeff Beck's Guitar Shop

I think everything he does is brilliant, but this album really hit me. *Where Were You* is just a mind-boggling track. I got to see it up close. I opened for him on the *Guitar Shop* tour in Japan and he really is a genius. He'd just practice through any shit amp and he still sounded like God. I did a little jam tour with Becko and Santana - no rehearsal, just play. It was scary but a lot of fun.

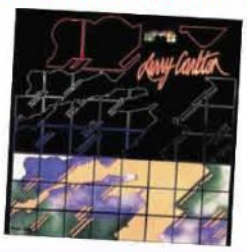
This record really did change the game for everyone...

Van Halen

Van Halen

When I first heard *Eruption* my jaw hit the floor. I said 'Fuck! Who is that? And how did he *do* that?' I had no idea how anyone could play that fast. It turns out we grew up in the same neighbourhood. We've been friends now for 35 years. We played on *Beat It* together. I still give him shit over that because he gets all the plaudits and he just did the solo! I played all the rhythm guitar, and the bass too.

When I was a kid I wanted to be just like Larry Carlton...



Larry Carlton

Larry Carlton

I've known Larry since I was 17. His guitar playing on Steely Dan's *Kid Charlemagne* was life-changing for me. I used to go and see him all the time, and I ended up playing rhythm in his band - it was like being paid to get guitar lessons from the master! The subtlety of his voicings is so special. I played organ on this LP because I was just hanging around the house while he demoed it.

Play This Track From My Album...

Steve Lukather

All's Well That Ends Well

A funny moment in the studio was doing the solo on *Can't Look Back*. We were talking about shred, and as a joke I did a pass where I did all that stuff - totally over the top. Everybody was jumping up and down and insisting we kept it. I thought, hell, we can let one flash solo slip through.

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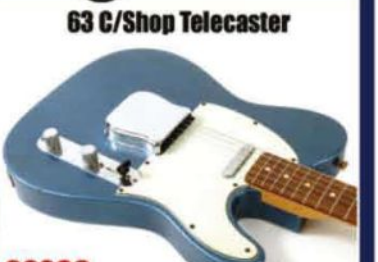

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Rosewood
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Travel TROUBLE

Does your guitar have an elephant ivory saddle or a Brazilian rosewood bridge? Beware of where you take it, for your precious instrument could be impounded. Adi Vines assesses how the CITES guidelines could impact on unwary musicians

There are problems on the horizon. I was hoping this month's column would be lighthearted and amusing, but after a chat with a colleague, I feel that something imminent is going to become a very important issue.

Word has reached the roadcrew community about a Canadian chap who sent his Taylor acoustic back to the makers in California for repair, but the guitar never completed its journey. For once, it wasn't the fault of FedEx. The guitar was seized by US Environmental Agents and impounded under the CITES (Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species) treaty because the fingerboard was Brazilian rosewood. A fine was issued, and paid, but the guitar has not been released - and never will be. If, like me, you thought that the restrictions on movements of rare woods only applied to large-scale shipments of raw materials, you were wrong. Things have now turned personal.

If you thought the restrictions on movements of rare woods only applied to large shipments, you were wrong. Things have now turned personal

The CITES treaty is a set of rules created in the 1970s to combat the trade in certain animal products. No doubt, this is a good thing. Most countries have signed up to the treaty, and over the years the list has grown to include many rare flowers, plants and trees. Restrictions apply only to logs of rare woods or sawn timber, not 'finished pieces' (eg furniture or musical instruments), but right near the top of the Appendix 1 list, where things are not so lenient, is Dalbergia Nigra - our beloved Brazilian rosewood, the movement of which, in any form, is severely restricted.

So where does this leave us? Well, within the EU you are generally okay, as long as you obtained the guitar from a legal source within the EU (beware grey imports). Also, any pre-1975 instrument is considered 'antique' and is exempt. However, should you want to gig outside Europe, things get more tricky; different countries implement CITES guidelines in different ways, and local laws can also make things very difficult. Australia's rules are particularly strict, for example. It's not inconceivable that a combination of these factors, along with an individual customs officer's lack of understanding of the CITES complexities, could lead to problems. Governments worldwide are now actively encouraging enforcement of CITES, so this is by no means an unlikely scenario.

To avoid any trouble, it will be necessary to obtain the correct import/export permit for ALL the countries you plan to visit, or leave the guitar with the ivory nut and tortoiseshell scratchplate behind. Permits for one-off trips cost around £60, or you can pay the same for a 'Travelling Exhibition Certificate' which is valid for three years and is accepted worldwide. Please note that this is not available to individuals, and there are strict eligibility criteria for a company to obtain one. In fact this document was, until recently, only available to 'travelling circuses'... a term that describes a rock'n'roll tour with uncanny accuracy.

So next time you're planning a break in the sun and are looking forward to strumming your faithful acoustic on a Caribbean beach, make sure your CITES-compatible permit is in your wallet alongside the passport and travellers cheques. Otherwise you may leave the country a musician but return as an illegal exporter of restricted goods, and therefore a criminal - and that really would ruin your holiday.

Adi Vines has worked with Radiohead, the Sex Pistols, the Darkness, Razorlight and more. See www.xselectronics.co.uk for more

Guitar

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Woke Up This Mornin'...

Reverberations

emails
letters
photos

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Please note, we reserve the right to edit where we feel it is appropriate, or to print extracts from longer correspondences

Star Letter

Jan's homebuilds: inspired by us!

TECHNICAL COLLAGE

What??? No technical feature in *Guitar & Bass* magazine? The November 2010 issue didn't even have an article on how to replace strings! I was desperately looking for something after *Private Collection* and before the ads, but nothing was there.

Since you started with the building of the Stinger amp in December 2000 (and later in detail in August 2001), you really got me going (and my wife desperate). Unfortunately the amp kits had all sold out and I had to go out and find suppliers in the Antwerp neighbourhood, but that led me to meet a very skilled tube-wizard who helped me later on with other projects.

Since 2001 I've been involved in building two valve amps (15W and 5W – the perfect sound machine), four of your stompboxes, and two electric guitars (the third is in the development phase). I've modified the electrics on all my other guitars, put two pickups on an old acoustic Klira, and relic'd my cousin's Strat and my brand-new Tele. Never a week goes by that I'm not thinking of a new project concerning modifying or building some guitar stuff.

Are you going to send me some methadone to help me to kick the habit? Please keep the articles on how to build, modify and repair going in your mag.

Jan De Swert
via email

***G&B:* Jan, we don't apologise for causing your addiction one little bit. In fact, we're proud, as so you should be proud of all the gear you've built over the years. We do, however, apologise for the temporary hiatus in our workshop articles. Rest assured that our soldering irons are warming up and normal service will be resumed shortly.**

ARIA

Written a Star Letter? Contact Aria on 0148 323 8720 to arrange delivery of your Fusion gig bag – electric, acoustic and bass models are all available!

COPY ME OUT

I was the one who wrote a letter published in your September 2010 issue criticising current makers for pretending to be historical and/or original, while in fact merely copying the real things. Stuart Lunt's letter (October 2010) with the inevitable 'guitar snob' insult and its justification of copying (as long as it saves him money) can't go unanswered, even though he's talking about things I never said.

Like almost every guitarist I know, I began on no-name pieces of junk and over many years have gone through a vast number of guitars. Some of my best early guitars were ones I made myself, because that's all I could afford. Later on, I enjoyed cobbling together a fine instrument from spare parts sold by Seymour Duncan out of his house when he was just starting up, with a body and neck from a remainders sale by Phil Kubicki. Like almost every guitarist I know, I never did and never would dump on the cheapest instrument I ever owned. Why? Because I was always happy to have whatever it was that allowed me to play! I believe this viewpoint to be virtually universal. And, frankly, even the dealers of the most pricey stuff, whom I meet at shows, are rarely truly snobbish. They're doing what they do because they love guitars. Stuart may rightly despise Bentley-driving guitar snobs and I might too, if I ever met one, but I haven't. I love this community of people who love guitars.

The copying and image-making is something else. Appropriating something created by another person and offering it as primarily one's own design is wrong, even if the result is a super-low price. Of course the price is low; years of creative thinking, experimentation, trial and error, prototyping and risk-taking in the market are completely avoided... and so, too, is any reward for creativity. I just wrote a new song. It's called *Back in Extremely Dark Gray*. Does that sound right?

Patrick Collins
via email

***G&B:* Patrick, judging by our postbag, your original letter did strike a real chord/nerve (depending on whether the correspondent agreed with you or not). Many care about the creativity involved in designing a guitar; others seem to only worry about whether a guitar is a good one or not. This debate, like the instruments, isn't going to go away any time soon, but the term 'snobbery' is bandied about way too much in these arguments. Everybody has likes and dislikes, but on our travels we've come across very few actual snobs – and we're glad of that.**

GUITAR GYM

NECK CORE EXERCISE

Pretty much everyone has heard of core exercises for the lower back, but the neck also has deep stabilising core muscles. When these are weak, other muscles step in to substitute for them, leading to poor stability at the spine and bad posture (like a forward-poking chin) and neck pain... even headaches. Re-training these muscles requires no equipment, just persistence and good technique – much like learning new pieces on the guitar.

Start by lying on your back with a small towel folded under your head. Keep your eyes open and look at the ceiling and then, as you gently nod your head, let your eyes move down towards your feet, then slowly return to the starting position. You're not lifting your head off the towel; it's just a nodding movement. You can progress to doing this sitting or standing, taking care not to bring the whole head forward, but simply nodding your head. You may find it easier leaning up against a wall, but do make sure your head doesn't lose contact with the wall. We'll explore more neck exercises next month!

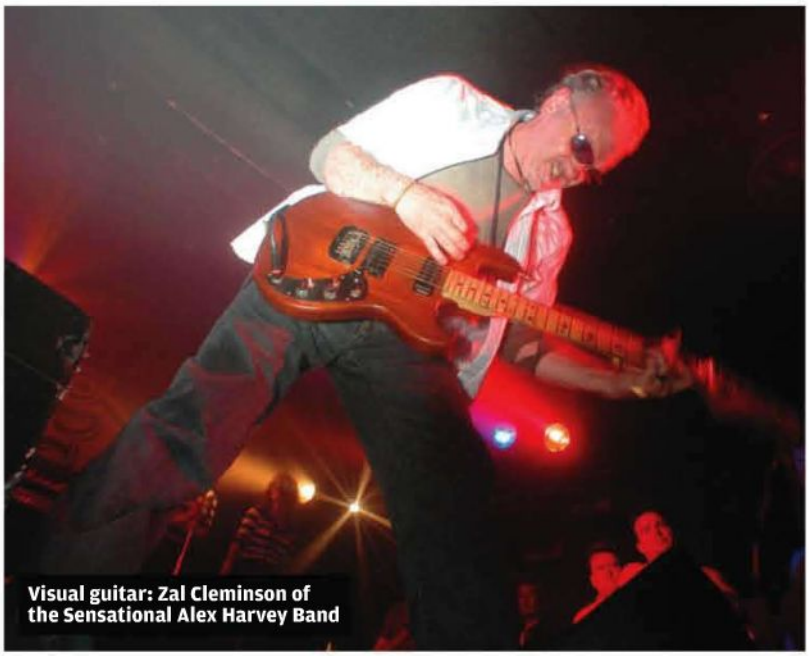
Got a health issue that affects your playing? Marion Turner is a physio specialising in musicians' injuries. Write to us, and we'll get her on to it

LOOK! BUT YOU DON'T LISTEN

I was intrigued, but disappointed, by the interview with John 5 in October's *Guitar & Bass*. Please, John 5, when you say 'there's never been an instrumental guitar player who has done anything really visual,' may I introduce you to a certain member of the Sensational Alex Harvey band called Zal Cleminson?

I wish I could steer John 5 to the SAHB via YouTube, because he's missing out on someone special, a real innovator and – unknown to John 5 – a grand uncle of his own guitar/theatre lineage. Come to think of it, Chuck Berry was also visual, and then there's Mick Ronson, Hendrix burning the guitar, Pete Townshend smashing guitars and bleeding down his white jumpsuit...

Keith McMillan
via email



Visual guitar: Zal Cleminson of the Sensational Alex Harvey Band

G&B: **We take your point, Keith. To be fair to John 5, he did say *instrumental* guitarists. However, we're not going to argue with anyone who rates Zal (or Mick, Chuck and Pete). Come to think of it, what are everybody's abiding visual images of a guitar player? We all know the classics, including those mentioned by Keith, but are there any others that deserve recognition? Send us your ideas...**

THE MOST UNDERSTANDING SPOUSE EVER

There, there, *Guitar & Bass*, have a cuddle from your Auntie Karen. Don't let that nasty Pete Griffin's letter (Nov 10) upset you. Boring? Never! He's got a bit of a cheek. He was *lent* a copy? So he didn't even buy one? Typical boss, eh? (And that comment about how it's a good job you don't work for him!! Ohhh). If he thinks this mag is boring, he's never read *Hello!*, *Chat!* or *More!*

Now, I don't like guitars, I can't play any instrument, I have no musical talent and no interest whatsoever. So why do I read *Guitar & Bass*?

Over the many years I've read your mag you've printed a picture of our Dave Mustaine look-a-like cat and helped with hubby's poorly pinkies. I flick through most of it, but I've grown a weakness for *Secret Shoppa* ('Have I been there?'), *Soundtrack Of My Life* (I like that, too), Adi Vines (great job), *Backstage* (fascinating) and, most importantly, *Reverberations* and *Private Collection*.

These two in particular are my therapy. It helps me understand and realise that the bloke I married isn't a nutter and that his 'GAS' is normal. It helps our marriage survive, because it helps me enter into his guitar-world mind and SEE (well, nearly).

So be proud of what you are, the service you give to me and other guitar widows the world over. And remember; we love you!

Karen Taylor
via email

G&B: **We're overwhelmed with the notion that non-players like the mag, and we're delighted it helps you understand your husband's passion. Are you *sure* you couldn't play a little guitar or bass yourself? No? Sorry. Forget we mentioned it.**

EDITOR'S LETTER

Yep, it's Gear Of The Year time, everybody. And once the cries of 'where did that year go?' die down, it becomes clear that it was a good year for those looking to buy new equipment.

While the harsh economic climate has hit many aspects of the industry, one of the positives consumers should take from the situation is that substandard gear is less likely to be made and foisted onto us. All the categories were fiercely contested. It was grand to see that the big brands weren't resting on their laurels, and that small makers were able to survive – and, in some cases, thrive.

One thing that became apparent when going through the 2010 releases is that the successful makers are the ones who know when to draw inspiration and learn lessons from their illustrious predecessors, but also know when to adapt and/or improve on what has gone before. Sometimes the innovation is only a slight tweak, but – as we all know – it can make the difference between good and great.

Enjoy the issue...

John Callaghan
EDITOR
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Faith

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Woke Up This Mornin'...

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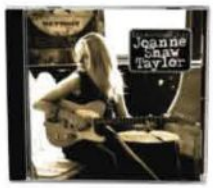
Buddy Guy
Living Proof
(Sony)

Buddy returns with blues gold, made all the more enticing thanks to a rare collaboration with the inimitable BB King. Add a luscious guest showing from Santana, and *Living Proof* was bound to bear fruit. From the sweet slide that introduces *74 Years Young* to the bouncing solo-centric instrumental *Skanky*, this album holds some of the truest, most expressive cuts we could have asked for. Relax, put your feet up and immerse yourself in its porchlight charms.

Status Quo
Live At The BBC
(UMC)

This celebratory double CD is a unique review of the evolution of our denim-loving national treasures. Featuring sessions and live performances from their earlier incarnations the Spectres and Traffic Jam, this collection should prove a genuine delight for lovers of the shuffle. Plump for the four-CD set and there's four extra live shows, and diehards can bag the lot with the seven-CD set (including a live DVD).

Joanne Shaw Taylor
Diamond In The Dirt
(Ruf)



Shaw Taylor scored the 'Female Vocalist Of The Year' title and a 'Best New Artist Debut' nomination at this year's British Blues Awards, and it's easy to see why. Her haunting vocal delivery works wonders, smouldering away over a Tele's groovesome twang, and her tight, measured licks stand proud without ever overstepping the mark. This is graceful blues with a tantalising, pumped-up twist. Check her out on tour this month for proof.

Dave Arcari
Devil's Left Hand
(Buzz)

Listening to this album, it's conceivable to think that Arcari's fingers are actually possessed by the dark one himself. Slidework that's

rough around the edges and a gravelly Scottish drawl all add up to an addictive package. Highlights include *MacPherson's Lament*, in which Arcari soundtracks Robbie Burns' poetry, and the diddly-bow stomp of *Dragonfly*. A collection of beaten-up brilliance.

Boz Boorer
Miss Pearl & My Wild Life
(Floating World)

Originally one of London's punky rockers the Polecats, Boorer has since guested on many an album, from ivory-tinkler Jools Holland to Ivor Novello- winning songstress Joan Armatrading. This double helping is overflowing with bustling rockabilly fun and shuffling rock'n'roll that'll have you up on your feet and embarrassing your kids in a heartbeat. If you're one for drive-ins and greased-back barnets then this is a sure-fire winner.

Snap Judgements

Shark Frenzy
Richie Sambora
(Floating World)

Before Bon Jovi, Sambora was honing his skills with Shark Frenzy. Lovers of the stadium soft-rockers may enjoy this; we aren't convinced. Hammed-up plod-rock.

Saint Jude
Diary Of A Soul Friend
(SJR)

Ronnie Wood donned an axe to jam with them, and Jimmy Page is a fan - lofty praise indeed. Rib-pounding, vibey blues-rock fronted by a fiery soulstress. Yes.

Fourplay
Let's Touch The Sky
(Heads Up)

New recruit Chuck Loeb lays down some tidy guitar work on Fourplay's latest jazz spectacular. Whether composed or letting rip, this group cuts it every time.

Jenny And Johnny
I'm Having Fun Now
(Warner Bros.)

Lush, radiant and debonair, this is a very beautiful debut. The music hypnotises, the lyrics keep you on your toes. We're getting obsessive about it already.

Soft Machine Legacy
Live Adventures
(Moonjune)

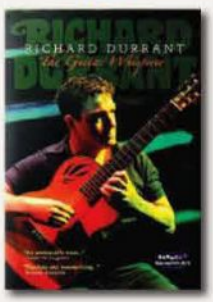
Live Adventures covers territory old and new, blending some novel reworkings of Soft Machine classics with fresh sonic experimentations. Warped magic.

Todd Sharpville
Porchlight
(MIG)

He beat Clapton to a 'Best UK Guitarist' award in 1995 and joined the reformed Yardbirds. These smooth tunes should please the most fervent blues fans.

DVDs

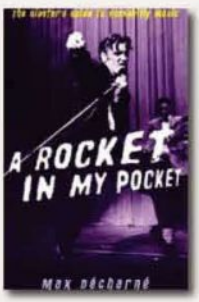
Richard Durrant
The Guitar Whisperer
(Seventh Art)



Durrant begins with Bach on the tenor banjo (!) and continues through a repertoire that's second to none, taking in everything from Agustin Barrios' stunning *Un Sueno En La Floresta* and Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells* to his own awesome compositions. Not only does *The Guitar Whisperer* reveal Durrant's exceptional ability, it also brings to light his artful arrangements. To add to the jaw-dropping (and humorous) live performance, this DVD includes a fascinating documentary in which Durrant explores his love of music and a candid interview with the man himself. Mesmerising stuff.

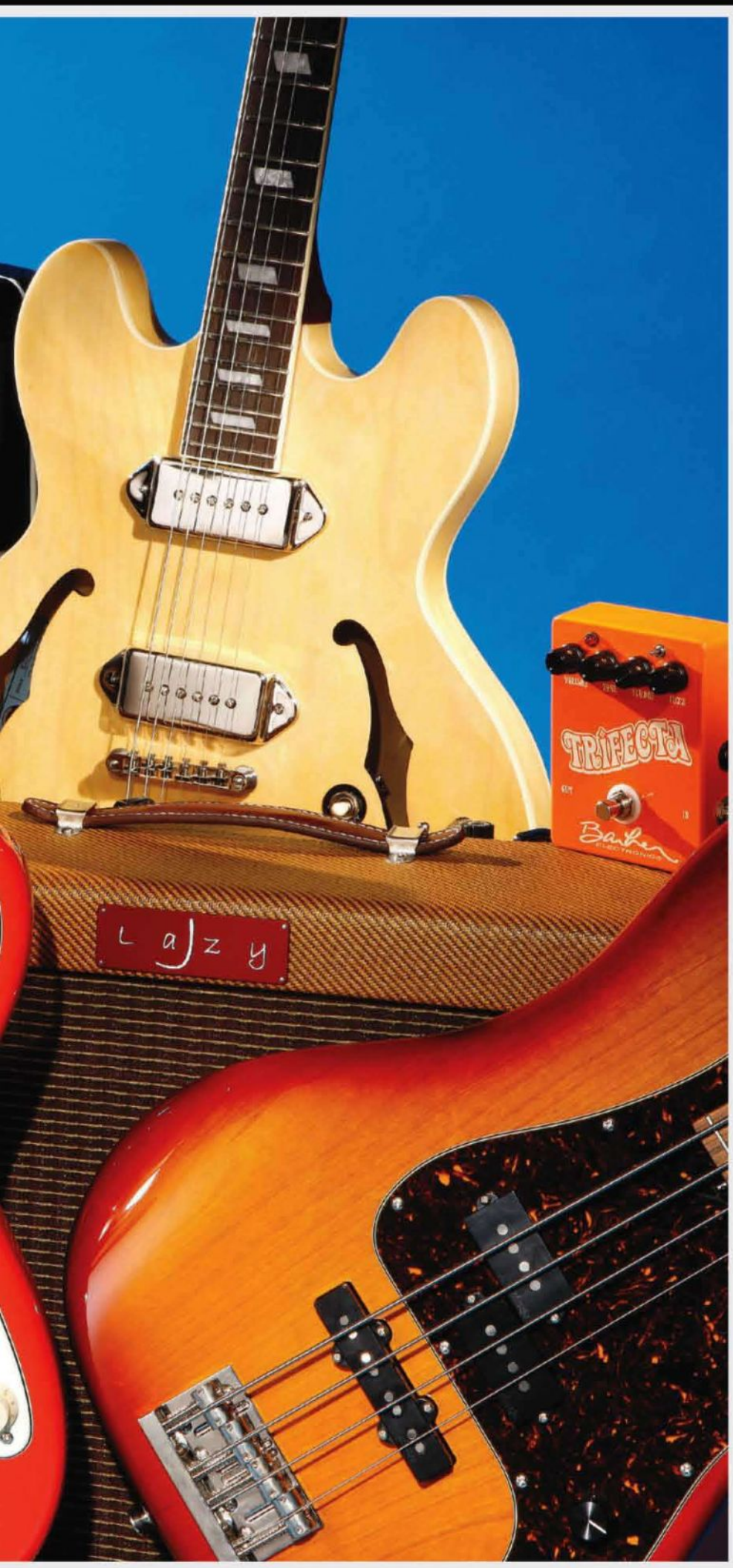
Books

A Rocket In My Pocket
Max Décharne
(Serpent's Tail)



Décharne's new book delves deep into the twisted evolution of rockabilly, revealing everything there is to know about this hip-shaking musical movement, a domain so often left in the shadows. It's all here; hillbilly origins, Elvis ('The Hillbilly Cat'), Sun Studios, the Grand Ole Opry, Wanda Jackson, the fashion, the attitude, the resurgence. Couple this in-depth trip into yesteryear with the author's bottomless enthusiasm for the genre, and it's a riveting riot of a read that breathes new life into the oft-unopened vaults of a vital chapter of rock'n'roll history. Essential.

The Very Best of 2010



Guitar Awards 2010

If you've ever gone into a music shop and despaired at sorting the good from the bad, let these awards be your friendly guide. We've chosen the best-built, best-sounding and, heck, the most vibey equipment we've reviewed in the past 12 months, and assembled it in one handy issue. Enjoy!

20 Electric Guitars Under £500
The best-value six-stringers out there

24 Electric Guitars £500–£1000
The all-important mid-price bracket

28 Electric Guitars Over £1000
Looking for your dream guitar?

32 Acoustic Guitars Under £500
Go-anywhere instruments

36 Acoustic Guitars Over £500
Instruments for a lifetime

40 Electro-Acoustics Under £500
Open-mic specials for minimum dough

44 Electro-Acoustics Over £500
Great all-rounders for any gig

49 Guitar Amplifiers Under £1000
The best sounds for your cash

53 Guitar Amplifiers Over £1000
Unashamed sonic glory!

57 Acoustic Amplifiers
Just like the real thing, but louder

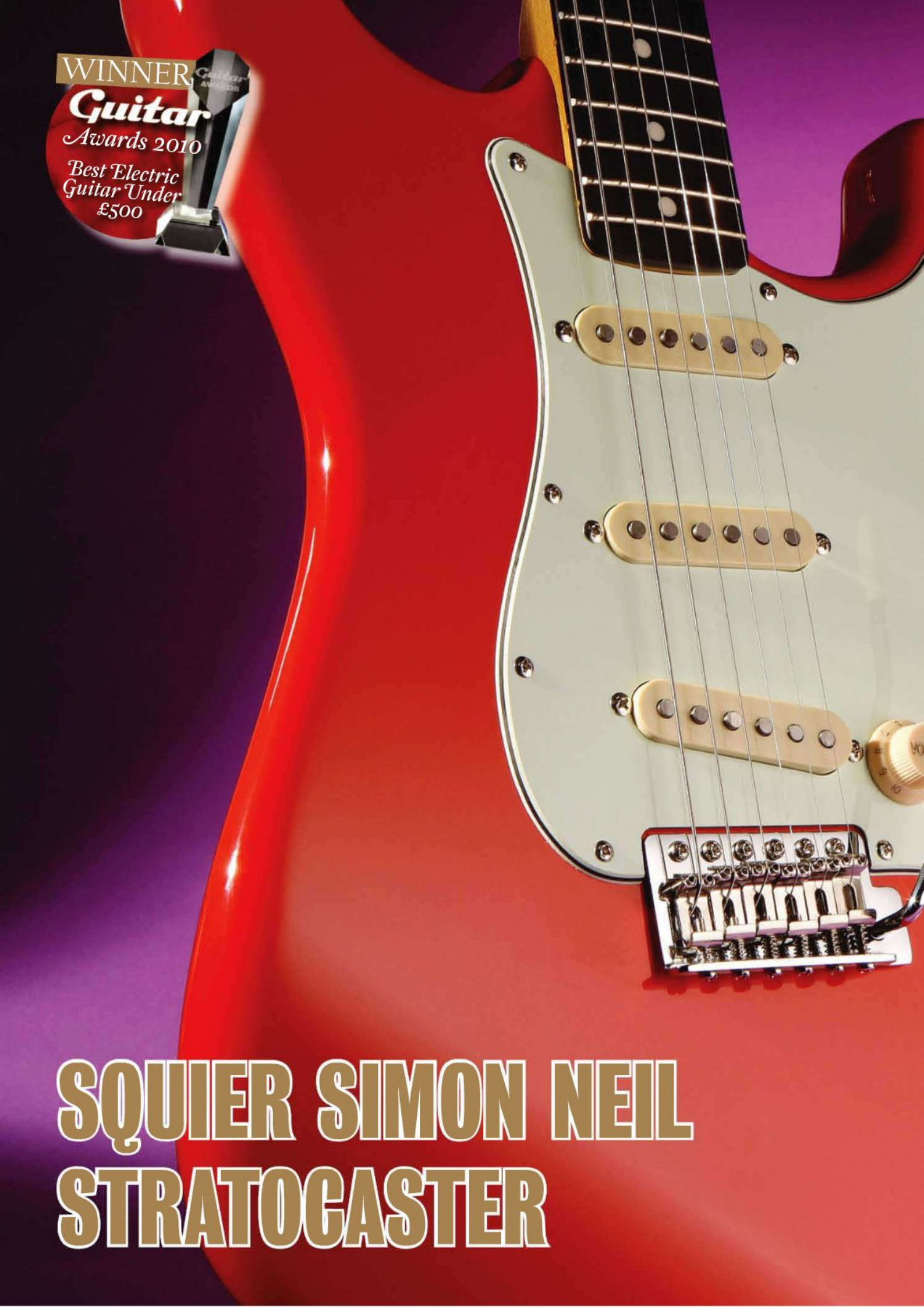
63 Best Effects
Boxes that'll change your life

67 Best Accessories
From gigbags to footstompers

68 Bass Guitars Under £1000
Low end for low outlay

74 Bass Guitars Over £1000
The finest new four-stringers

79 Best Bass Amplifiers
From rehearsals to scary big stages



SQUIER SIMON NEIL STRATOCASTER

WINNER

Even if you've never heard of Biffy Clyro or Simon Neil, this guitar still deserves your attention. Beneath the subtly badged headstock it's a modified Squier Classic Vibe '60s Strat built as close to Neil's favoured Custom Shop models as a skeleton budget would allow. The result is a truly splendid take on a fiesta red Strat that looks the part and delivers outstanding tone for the money. The finish is completely plausible and the mint green plate and plastic parts add a convincing aesthetic appeal. The neck is way above normal entry-level fare, with a slim C shape, a vintage tint, excellent fretwork and a flatter-than-vintage fingerboard.

Neil also stipulated some serious R&D for the pickups, and these 'Custom Vintage Style' single coils fulfil his requirements for differing output voicings between the bass and treble sides. There's grunt and snarl on the bottom strings and a hint more buttery warmth on the thin ones than expected – something Fender achieved by mixing three Alnico 5 magnets and a trio of Alnico 3 treble slugs. It plays fantastically... and for anyone with bit of cash stashed away, we'd find it hard to imagine a better spare gigging guitar.

Reviewed January 21/03
£359.98

Contact: Fender Europe 01342 331700
Web: www.squierguitars.com

Reviewed July 21/09 £249

Contact: Sutherland Trading 0292 0887333
Web: www.sutherlandtrading.com

BURNS COBRA

If you need the classic three-pickup format but want to be different, this is the answer. The Cobra is really well constructed and you'll stand out thanks to the batwing headstock and the segmented scratchplates, while beneath your right hand is a knife-edge vibrato and three specially-designed downsized Tri-Sonic pickups. The unplugged tone is brilliant – balanced, deep and woody, with a sweet chime and lots of sustain. The neck and middle pickups share a tone control, and the bridge tone control doubles as a neck/bridge series switch.

These low-noise pickups have plenty of treble but no harshness. The bridge combines a hint of quack with a throaty, scooped midrange. The mids fill out in the middle position, and the neck adds mellowness without sacrificing transparency. The in-between settings provide stellar Robert Cray and early Knopfler tones, and series mode fattens things up a treat. You'd be hard pushed to find any S-type that plays or sounds better at this price.

The Cobra is really well constructed and comes with three specially-designed downsized Tri-Sonic pickups

Reviewed June 21/08 £249.00

Contact: JHS 01132 865381
Web: www.jhs.co.uk

VINTAGE FILLMORE V6JMH

If the Simon Neil Strat takes a 'sophisticated hot-rod' stab at a '60s classic, then the Vintage V6JMH slips in the side hatch with a cheeky nod toward a legend. Part of the Reissued series and named after the Fillmore East venue in New York, it has a none-too-subtle Hendrix influence. While there's nothing exactly ground-breaking about slapping on a reverse headstock, the Fillmore also flips the pickup configuration to mimic the tone of an upside-down reverse-strung guitar but without the inconvenience of awkwardly-placed control knobs and a vibrato arm dangling across the bridge saddles. The aesthetics won't appeal to all and the notion of a bigger-sounding bridge treble-side pickup is somewhat debatable, but what isn't in doubt is the class of build in this price range and the sheer fun of it all. Beneath the quirky exterior lies a seriously playable instrument: the fretwork and the set-up are impressive and the Wilkinson WVS single coils really come alive through a dirty amp, with the juice held firmly in tune by E-Z-Lok tuners and a vintage-style vibrato bridge. By unleashing this guitar onto the world for £250, Vintage has excelled.

The Fillmore flips its bridge pickup to mimic an upside-down Strat with none of the inconvenience

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WINNER
Guitar
Awards 2010
Best Electric
Guitar £500-
£1000
Vox
SSC55

WINNER

Two features set the superb SSC55 apart – the bridge and the pickups. The aluminium Max Connect bridge is low mass to maximise string vibration transfer to the body. The Vox CoAxe pickups combine central polepieces with magnetic blades and two windings plus three-way mode switches for single coil, P90 and PAF tones – all humbucking.

The radically sculpted body has equally thick layers of ash and mahogany; its natural resonance could fool anybody into thinking the SSC55 is a semi rather than a solidbody. The depth of the set neck tenon allows the heel area to be tapered so it's barely any thicker than the neck itself, while the slightly flat medium C profile feels effortless to play.

Single coil mode has clarity and transparency with plenty of chime, jangle and snap. With overdrive or distortion the SSC55 really sings and the individual voices of the pickups and their modes become even more pronounced, from biting aggression to a rounded and expressive vocal quality. This is a versatile and characterful guitar that handles clean, overdrive and even fuzz with equal effectiveness and slips into controllable feedback-assisted sustain with ease.

Reviewed December 22/02
£998

Contact: Korg UK 01908 857100
Web: www.voxamps.com

Reviewed October 21/12 £844

Contact: Gibson 020 7167 2144
Web: www.gibson.com

EPIPHONE JOHN LENNON

'INSPIRED BY' REVOLUTION CASINO

In a rare example of common sense, Gibson dropped the awesome but pricy US-built Lennon Casino for this 'Inspired by' version, shaving the original price tag down by some $3,000. The Indonesian chassis is kitted out with high-quality components and recreations of the mods Lennon carried out on his own guitar such as gold Grover tuners, elevating it to a different league: the stripped natural finish and historically correct appointments will be enough to send many people of a certain age drooling to the bank, but for the squeamish or more conservatively-minded there's also an 'as new' 1965 Casino in the range.

The hollow maple laminate body generates a fabulous acoustic sound all on its own, but plug into a decent valve amp and the twin nickel-plated Gibson USA P90s deliver a truly mighty tone with all the chewy warmth, clarity and dangerous handling you can cope with. This guitar may be light on the shoulder but it's a thumping, joyous playing experience.

Into a decent valve amp, the P90s deliver a mighty tone with all the warmth and clarity you can cope with

Reviewed April 21/06 £839

Contact: Fender 01342 331700
Web: www.fender.co.uk

FENDER AMERICAN SPECIAL STRAT

Value for money is a theme that Fender's been keen to promote this year, and the new American Special Strat is the first US-built model for under £1000 in many years (and you can probably take £200 off by shopping around). Despite the credit-crunch price tag this guitar's built from classic Strat timbers with an alder body and a maple neck, and quality hardware has been used throughout. Curiously, there's a bit of a '70s theme thrown in for good measure in the form of a big headstock and jumbo gauge fretwire, but the zingy, snappy tone of this American Special instantly lets you know it will outperform those less-than-ideal vintages of 30 years ago.

The well-voiced single coil pickups deliver excellent versions of all the classic Strat sounds and Fender's patented Greasebucket tone circuit delivers improved tonal flexibility. The one-piece maple neck/fingerboard feels great (there's a rosewood-topped option to consider as well as a HSS model if you favour a humbucker at the bridge). This guitar eats funk, jazz and rock for breakfast - and will help you make the best of your playing.

The first sub-£1000 US-built Stratocaster in many years eats funk, rock and jazz for breakfast

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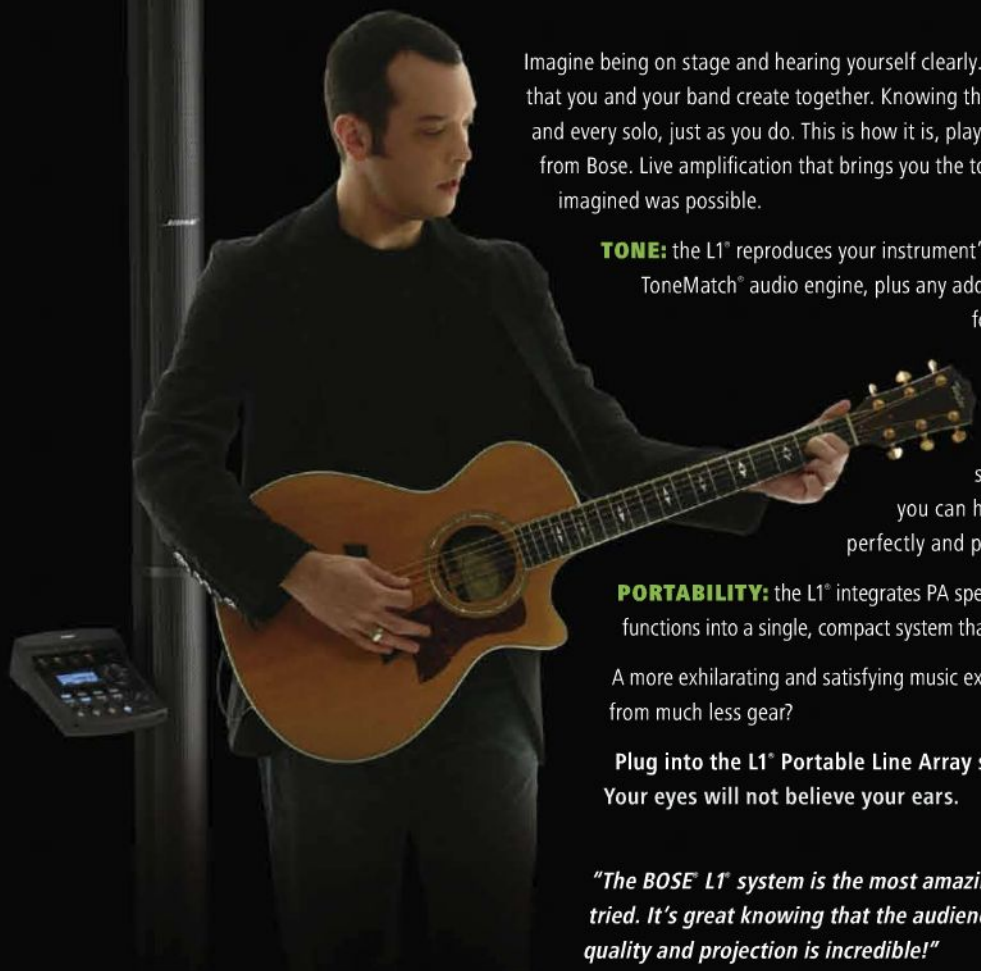

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– Robbie Gladwell AKA Dr Robert, guitarist with Steve Harley and Cockney Rebel

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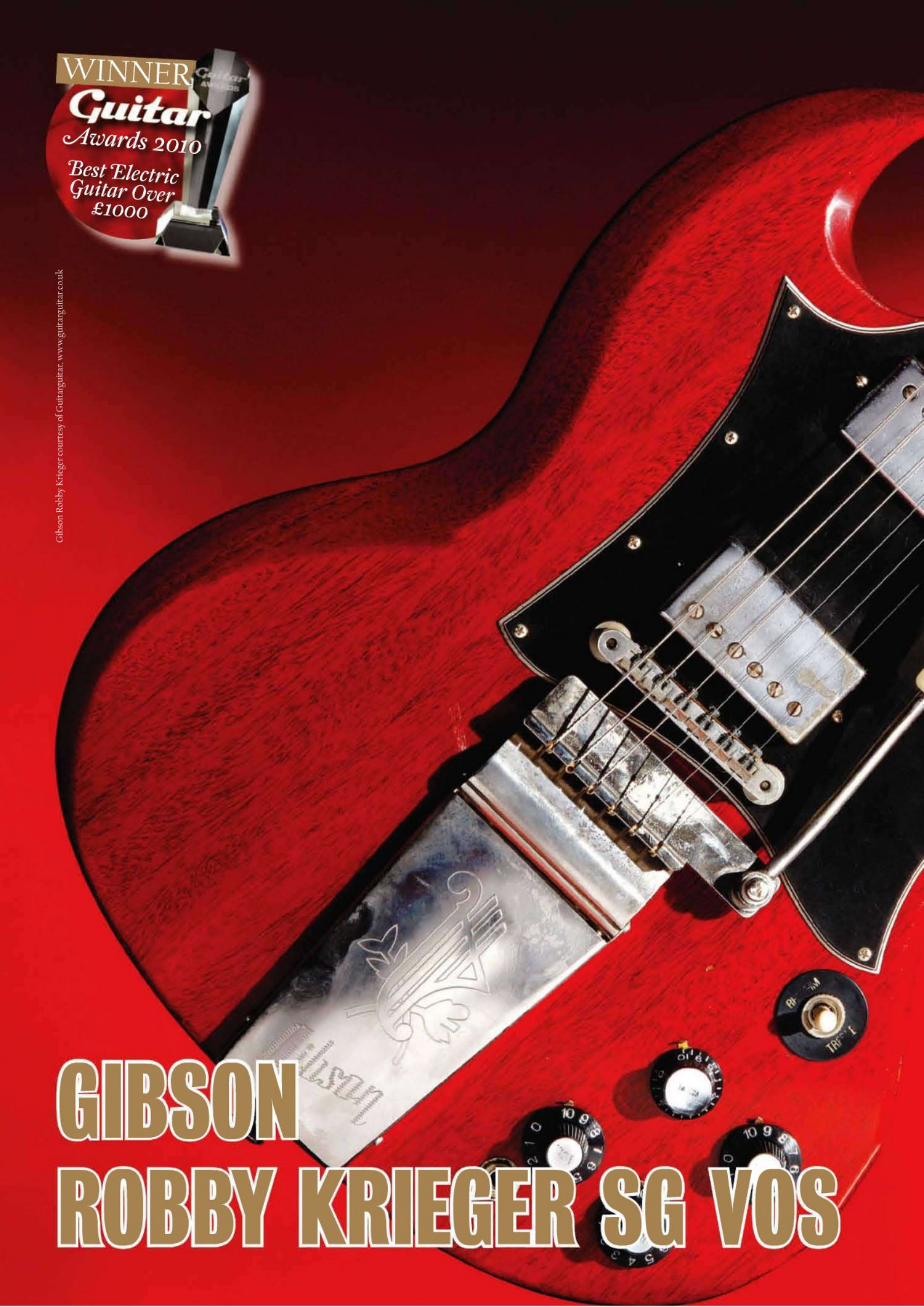

WINNER
Guitar
Awards 2010
Best Electric
Guitar Over
£1000
Gibson Robby Krieger courtesy of Guitarguitar, www.guitarguitar.co.uk
GIBSON
ROBBY KRIEGER SG VOS

WINNER

Seriously limited production numbers and a lofty price tag suggested something special with the Krieger SG, and we weren't disappointed. Built around a Gibson Standard reissue, it seamlessly blends the feel of several SGs that the Doors guitarist has owned over the decades. A subtly aged nitro finish and plastic parts convince you that you're lifting a real-deal oldie from the case, and the 'flamenco-flat' lower neck profile is a delight in the palm and far less scary than it sounds in print. The Gibson Maestro vibrato system – so often jettisoned in favour of a stop tailpiece – is included because Robby requires a bit of wobble on some songs (bear in mind that if this guitar had gone into production as planned 15 years ago, it would have been a very un-'60s Floyd Rose). The aged hardware is nickel-plated and the twin Gibson '57 humbuckers have push/pull wiring for out-of-phase operation... again, a sound Robby uses for the Doors set to this day. The normal humbucking sounds are as throaty and tightly focussed as SG lovers could wish for, flirting with Les Paul-like presence but without the cumbersome weight. It's a very, very good vintage-biased SG for the price of a knackered and modified original sample, and it lit our fire for sure.

Reviewed February 21/04 £2399

Contact: Gibson 0207 167 2144
Web: www.gibson.com

Reviewed December 22/02
£1292

Contact Korg UK 01908 857100
Web: www.voxamps.com

VOX HDC77

Two Voxes in Gear Of The Year? We don't take such a decision lightly, but this over-£1000 model is here because of quality, sound and innovative design. Like the SSC55 it has a cool lightweight bridge and clever CoAxe pickups, but this one's semi-acoustic, with laminated maple back and front and a 'short' mahogany core. The heel is tapered in a wide arch, creating great fret access without compromising wood-to-wood contact at the neck joint. Drawbacks: weight distribution causes it to swing towards the right, and there's some neck-heaviness.

Acoustically the HDC77 is very 'semi' - bright and loud with a lively, dynamic response. Amplified, it's slightly dark but harmonically complex. Set clean, the neck pickup conjures jazzy tones and cool Gretschy sounds, particularly with one or both pickups tapped. Overdrive and distortion establishes the HDC77's credentials as a killer blues guitar as well as a hard rocker in the Malcolm Young style. This semi could be your do-it-all guitar.

Jazzy tones, cool Gretschy sounds — and with overdrive the HDC77 is a killer blues guitar and a hard rocker

Reviewed November 22/01
£3336

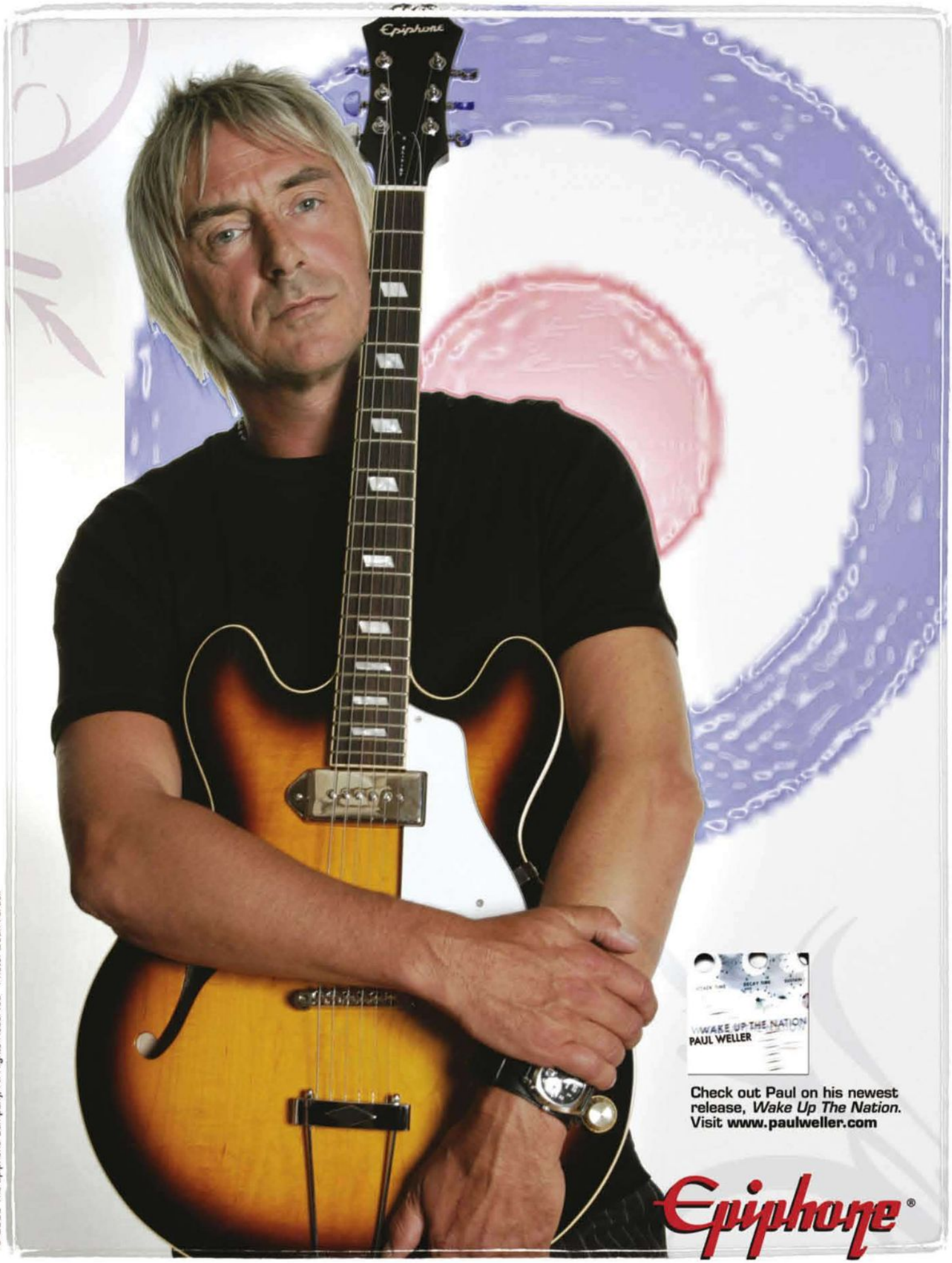
Contact: Rob Williams Guitars 01686 689120
Web: www.robwilliamsguitars.co.uk

ROB WILLIAMS SET NECK

Rob Williams has spent years working at some of the biggest guitar companies on the planet, but now he's now settled down in Wales to craft his own creations. It's been a good decision, as the Set Neck Carved Top Deluxe proves. Everywhere you look on the guitar you find excellence - tone, build, finish. From the Brazilian mahogany body with its sumptuously flamed bookmatched carved maple top to the laminated mahogany and walnut neck with its very sexy stripe effect on the back, you can see that both time and thought have gone into the design process. The sounds are resonant and classy, with a singing voice that will keep jazzers and wily old blues men playing into the small hours. Inside, though, an accomplished hard rocker waits to be unleashed.

The Set Neck is great to play, is very easy on the eyes, and will cover pretty much anything with the right tweaking on the tone and volume controls. If you're looking for something that will stand out from the crowd, give you years of professional level service and was built on these golden shores, then eschew the bigger names and give Rob Williams a call.

The Rob Williams Set Neck is great to play, very easy on the eyes, and will cover pretty much anything



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WINNER
Guitar
Awards 2010
Best Acoustic
Guitar Under
£500
VINTAGE
V400MH

WINNER

The Vintage V400MH dreadnought – one of three recently-introduced Mahogany Series guitars – evokes the stripped-back austerity of Martin Style 15 guitars of the '30s and '40s. It's all-mahogany, with a solid top and laminated back and sides, finished in a near-matt all over, with no binding and with trim largely confined to a herringbone soundhole rosette and a simple dot-markered fingerboard. It's handsome in a no-frills kind of way, with the chocolatey hue of the mahogany giving a warm, friendly look. It's a friendly player too, with a slick neck carved to a C-with-a-hint-of-V profile. The well-dressed frets are of near-medium width, and even electric players will feel right at home.

As for the sound, that's something everyone will relish. Aided, we don't doubt, by the minimalist, resonance-friendly finish, the guitar's delivery is bold and responsive, with a reassuringly rich low end and some expressive front-end snap when strummed hard. This is, for sure, a dreadnought that punches well above its price tag, and if your priority is the essentials rather than cosmetic embellishments then the V400MH represents superb value. £179? Heck, just buy one.

Reviewed October 21/12 £179

Contact: John Hornby Skewes 0113 286 5381
Web: www.jhs.co.uk

Reviewed October 21/12 £259

Contact: Westside Distribution 0141 248 4812
Web: www.westsidedistribution.com

RECORDING KING ROS-16

Recording King's Martin-influenced Century Studio Series are all 12-fret slothead 000s, and the solid spruce/mahogany gloss-finish ROS-16 belies its entry-level status. Smart period detailing includes an amber ageing toner on a herringbone-purfled top, an ebony bridge with open-ended 'long' saddle, cross-diamond fretboard markers, and open-back Grover Sta-Tites on a headstock with a diamond volute. The neck is one-piece (amazing for this money) and configured for fingerstyle with a 46.5mm nut width and super-airy 59mm spacing at the bridge. The profile is fairly deep and V'd, which may deter smaller-handed players, but it's true to the instrument's heritage.

This guitar sounds as good as it looks: strongly projecting and easy sustaining, with an open, enjoyably warm tone that blends sweet-edged highs and muscular lows. Affordable 12-fret pickers of this type are rare, and the ROS-16 is the best we've yet come across. It's pretty much unbeatable at the price.

Affordable 12-fret pickers of this type are rare, and the ROS-16 is the best we've yet come across

Reviewed July 21/9 £399

Contact: Music Force Distribution 01780 781630
Web: www.marinerguitars.com

MARINER VERTYS-DX

Manufacturers are increasingly looking for sustainable alternatives to traditional tonewoods, and for this all-solid, spruce-topped Green Series dreadnought Mariner has hit upon paulownia for the back and sides. Plantation-farmed in China and coppiced as opposed to felled, this timber grows like the clappers, is lightweight yet strong and is easy to work. The stripey honey-blonde colouring looks rather fetching, too. Non-endangered maple bindings, a nato neck and sonokeling (Indonesian rosewood) bridge and fingerboard further tick the Vertys-DX's eco-friendly boxes.

But does this green-conscious combination work? The answer is indubitably yes. The all-gloss finish is dead smart; the shallow-profile neck with Mariner's scoop-topped peghead is a snug, speedy handful, and the guitar delivers well in the sound department with decent dynamics and up-front punch. The airily bright, sustainful timbre is appealingly clear-toned, with a firm low end adding warmth. Not only a worthy dread, then, and the best Mariner we've yet tried, but it's the brand's cheapest full-size model to date. There's a happy irony for you.

Made of spruce, paulownia, nato, maple and sonokeling, this is a green-conscious guitar that really works

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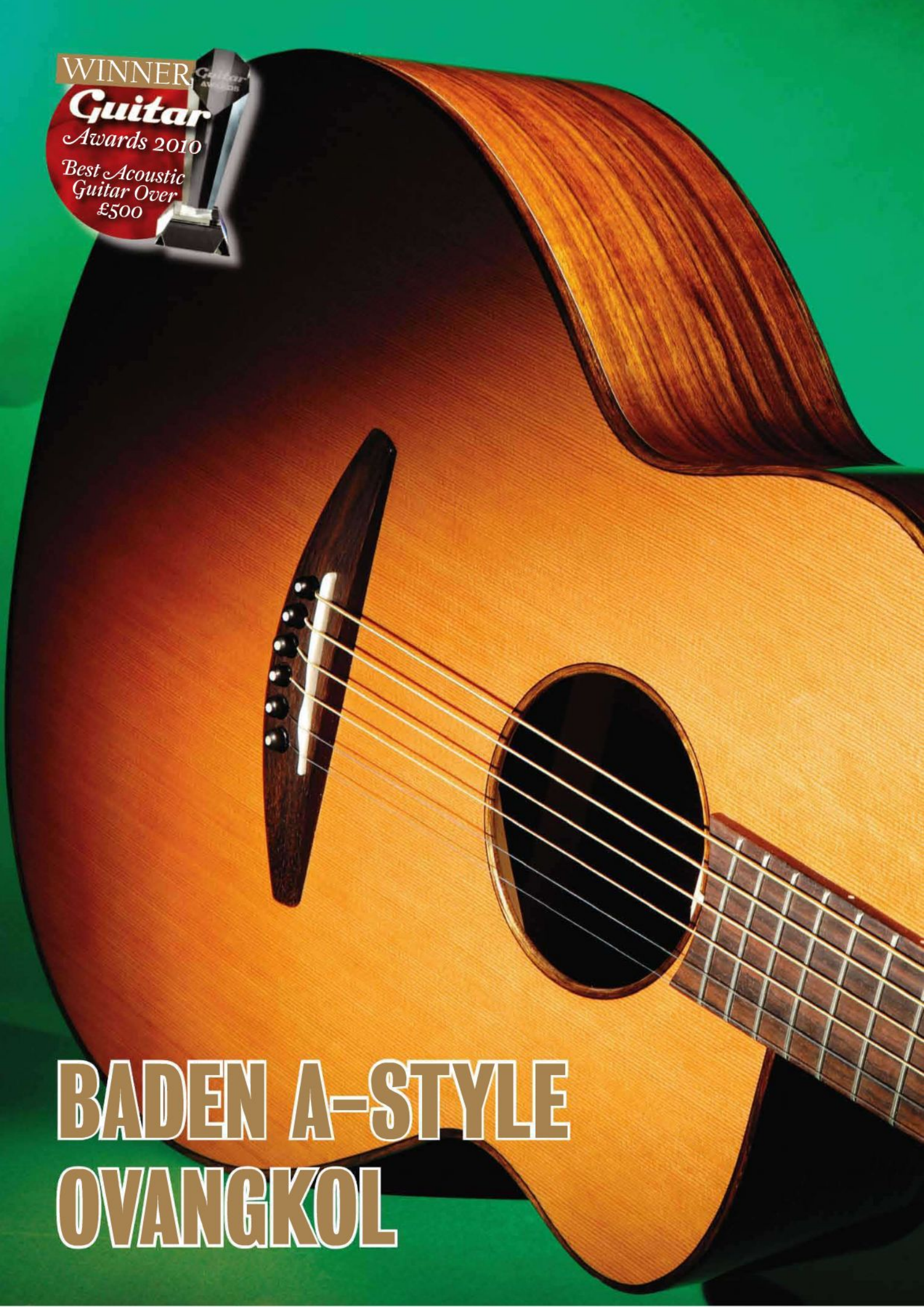
Vertys - DX

www.marinerguitars.com


WINNER
Guitar
Awards 2010
Best Acoustic
Guitar Over
£500
BADEN A-STYLE
OVANGKOL

WINNER

Last year a Baden A-Style Mahogany electro scooped a win in our Gear Of The Year awards, and the recently introduced Ovangkol acoustic version deservedly earns a reprise for 2010. Unlike the other timber variants which are all-solid wood, the cedar-topped Ovangkol model has laminated back and sides, so it's the least expensive in the range. The fundamental elements remain the same: it's got a cutaway but it isn't cutaway in a conventional sense... rather, it's as if the upper bout has been dropped down from the neck joint. Inside, the rim and linings continue across the face of the neckblock instead of butting up to it as normal. The outcome is both innovative and elegant.

The feel and the performance of this deep-bodied auditorium are a delight. It's got a slick, regular-width neck (slightly shallower than on early Badens), and a truly fab sound. It's rich in volume and projection, the tone marries a bright clarity with an infusion of cedary warmth, and the response is fast and dynamic. The quality of the Vietnamese build is tip-top too, making this a highly desirable guitar, whether as an acoustic or with an optional Fishman system.

Reviewed December 22/2
£759

Contact: 440 Distribution 0113 258 9599
Web: www.badenguitars.com

Reviewed January 21/3 £3250

Contact: Fylde Guitars 01768 891515
Web: www.fyldeguitars.com

FYLDE LEONARDO

This 16"-wide, cutaway small jumbo is the first production Fylde since the '70s to be made with maple back and sides. Boss Roger Bucknall reckons the timber can look 'rather amateur', but he's turned that notion well and truly on its head here. The flamed maple is master-grade, highlighted by marquetry-purfled rosewood binding: it looks gorgeous, as does the equally high-grade sitka top. Somewhat unusually on an acoustic, the semi-wide neck is also maple, actually a two-way sandwich divided by a fillet of dyed boxwood. Like all Fyldes, it employs a zero fret, ensuring an easy action.

Maple has a wiry-sounding reputation, but here we find a pinpoint, hi-fi-like clarity and a sweet zing, seamlessly integrated within a warm, attacking overall sound supported by a delicious, chimey sustain. Bell-like strums and plangent pickings are equally well catered for. In short, the Leonardo is a cracking guitar, brimming with personality and made with all Fylde's typical care, precision and flourish.

This is the first maple Fylde made since the '70s. It's a cracking guitar, brimming with personality

Reviewed September 21/11 £2095

Contact: Atkin Guitars 01227 719933
Web: www.atkinguitars.com

ATKIN OMH-28

One of three new spruce/rosewood Retrospectives from Canterbury's Alister Atkin, the OMH-28's slightly cheeky moniker removes any guesses as to the guitar's influences. Yes, it echoes a pre-war Martin Style 28 OM, substituting some of Atkin's usual styling and trim with features like herringbone purfling, spade headstock, short-pattern diamond-square fingerboard markers, and a belly bridge (though not with a vintage 'long' saddle). The instrument is faultlessly finished in high-gloss nitrocellulose; the neck joint is Alister's own Collings-style bolting system. Our sample has a regular 43mm-wide neck, but dedicated pickers can opt for 45mm at no extra cost.

The OMH-28 nails a classic folk-style sound. Slightly scooped mids and relatively bright highs ensure mean picking clarity, while the richly toned bottom end has a rosewoody warmth and fluidity. Dynamics are responsive, and there's plenty of headroom and expression. This guitar is a finely honed homage, not a clone, and it retains the Atkin personality and high-level skill in its execution. No doubt, it's a very persuasive fusion.

This guitar is a fine homage, not a clone, and it retains the Atkin personality and skilled execution

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WASHBURN
D9CE

WINNER

Washburn is poised to launch a whole new range of acoustics, but in the meantime the D9CE cutaway dreadnought marches on as one of the best-value, entry-level electro-acoustics around. Okay, its spruce/mahogany body is all-laminate, but the guitar is very smartly decked out with an all-gloss livery, a pretty marquetry soundhole rosette, a white-bound fingerboard and black-buttoned tuners. The pickup system isn't lacking either, offering four-band EQ, a tuner (albeit preset not chromatic) and the bonus of both jack and XLR outputs, enabling DI'ing to a desk. The preamp's rubberised knobs feel nicely tactile.

Acoustically the D9CE isn't hugely dynamic and the highs can sound a tad raw, but the overall balance isn't too bad at all. Plugged in, it proves quite a powerhouse, the preamp supplying abundant gain and plenty of tonal scope thanks to 12dB of cut and boost on each band. The only advice is go easy on treble and presence to avoid an overly brittle top end. Taken altogether, the D9CE is an impressively cheap buy, not least because it's only £35 more than the acoustic D9... and it comes with a hard case. How's that for a deal-maker?

Reviewed February
21/4
£184

Contact: Sound Technology 01462 480000
Web: www.soundtech.co.uk

Reviewed October 21/12 £249

Contact: John Hornby Skewes 0113 286 5381
Web: www.jhs.co.uk

VINTAGE VE900MH

The VE900MH is one of the Mahogany Series stablemates to our under-£500 acoustic winner, the V400MH, so the stripped-back aesthetic applies in equal measure. This one, though, is a grand auditorium, a body style that hadn't figured in Vintage's catalogue prior to last year's introduction of the Sweetwater Series. The body shape pays a nod to Taylor's cutaway GA design, and it's none the worse for that. A Fishman Isys+ preamp provides two-band EQ, phase reverse and an efficient auto-chromatic tuner that mutes the output when activated (and it works unplugged, too). Firing up the system reveals a natural, open voicing, decent gain and sensible EQ ranges for tailoring warmth and sparkle to taste. Acoustically you might expect the large, fairly deep body to deliver more clout and richness, but the controlled, nicely-poised sound is an asset for easy, relatively feedback-resistant electro performance. That's where the VE900MH's strength lies - and the price is tempting.

The VE900MH's poised acoustic sound is an asset for feedback-resistant electro performance

Reviewed November 22/1 £235

Contact: Go To Guitars 01925 444696
Web: www.gotoguitars.com

FAIRCLOUGH BLACKBIRD

If you're looking for a big-bodied electro strummer that looks great for not much money, then the Blackbird - one of Fairclough's recently introduced Songbird Series - should immediately go on the short-list. This 16"-wide spruce/rosewood cutaway jumbo might be all-laminated but the back and sides appear to be genuine rosewood, the gloss lacquer is buffed to a high standard, and herringbone graces the top purfling, soundhole rosette and back centre strip. The neck's binding and headstock's pearl logo and motif also lend an upmarket aura, despite our sample's rather scrappy internals and untidy fretboard finishing. A 'Friday-afternoon' factory aberration, we reckon.

Like the Vintage VE900MH above, the Blackbird employs a Fishman Isys+ system, and the same comments apply: in essence, an enjoyably natural palette of powered sounds. As an acoustic performer, the guitar has reasonable verve and projection for its jumbo dimensions, and the tone is likeably warm and reasonably vibrant. A competent budget all-rounder, then, with a visual appeal that comfortably exceeds the asking price.

If you're looking for a strummer that looks great for not much money, this is a competent all-rounder

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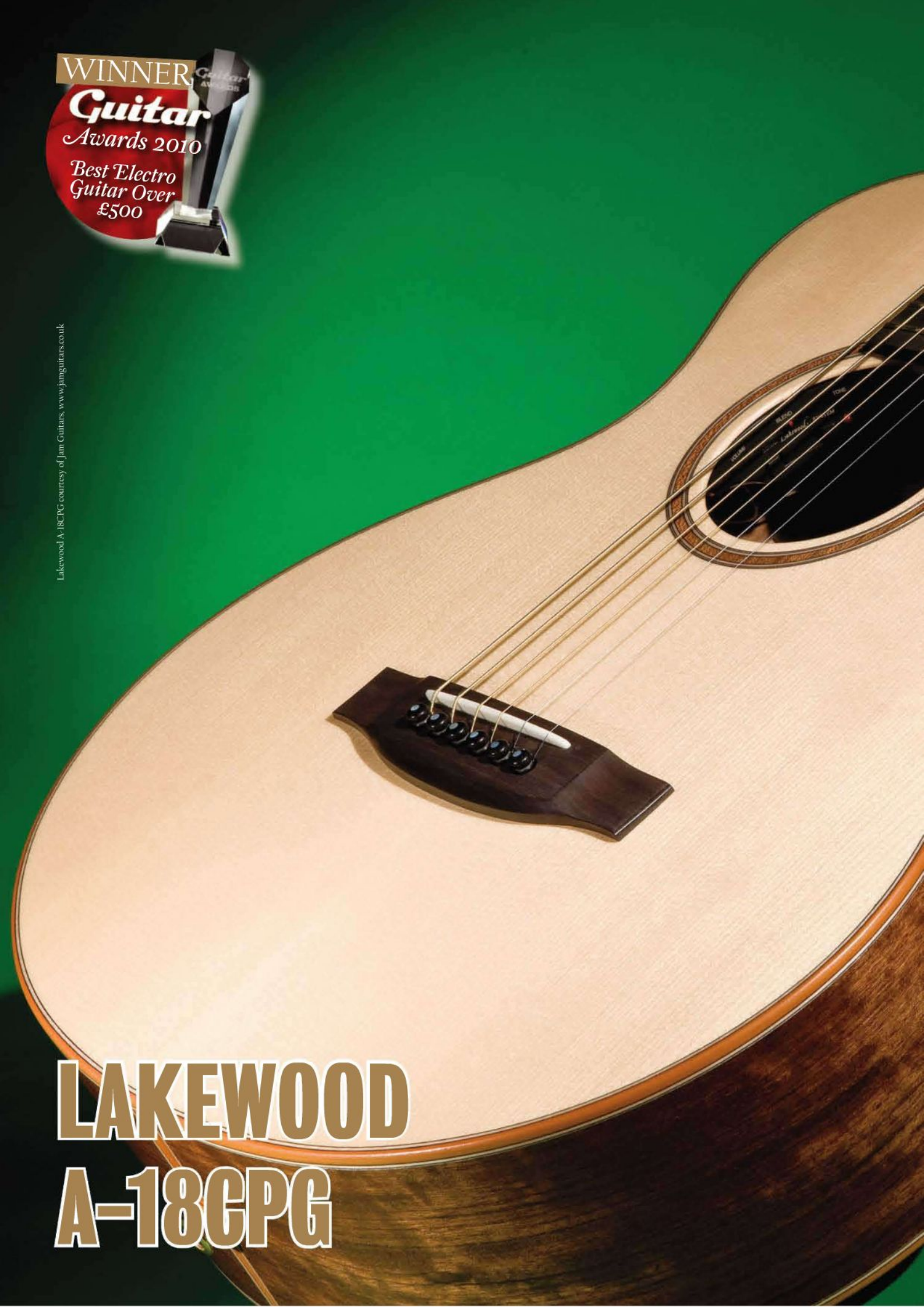
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Lakewood A-18CPG courtesy of Jam Guitars, www.jamguitars.co.uk
LAKEWOOD
A-18CPG

WINNER

Last year premier German maker Lakewood started making a range of instruments exclusively for the UK. The small-bodied A-18CPG is one such, and its combination of 12 frets to the body, cutaway and pickup system makes it a rare find. The all-solid spruce/ovangkol body has an open-pore satin finish which won't be to everyone's visual taste, but it's hard to carp when the guitar is such a delight. Build and detailing are pristinely clean, the cutaway extends access while retaining a 12-fretter's intrinsic poise, and the slothead neck is a wide, picker-friendly affair yet fairly shallow too.

The A-18CPG's acoustic voicing is fluidly lyrical with an outstanding tonal purity, fusing gently sparkling highs and a warm lower-end bloom. The guitar's Sonic System boasts a Shadow Nanoflex undersaddle transducer, a Nanomag magnetic pickup under the fingerboard and soundhole-located volume, tone and blend controls. Fired up it offers an impressively varied, high-quality range from the Nanoflex's conventional electro tones to the Nanomag's creamier, jazzier textures. Excellent stuff from an instrument that successfully straddles vintage and modern.

Reviewed January 21/3
£1649

Contact: Synergy Distribution 0121 270 6485
Web: www.lakewood.de

Reviewed August 21/10 £1219

Contact: Yamaha Music UK 01908 366700
Web: www.yamaha-europe.com

YAMAHA APX1200

The range-topping, all-solid spruce/rosewood APX1200 is one of three Yamahas to carry the company's new Studio Response Technology system. Rather like Fishman's Aura, this blends the undersaddle signal with six acoustically-recorded virtual mic images representing close- and far-mic'ed versions of three image presets. The three-band System 62 preamp also offers a muting auto-chromatic tuner, a mic-image resonance control which adds lower-end warmth and body, and, niftiest of all, a hugely effective five-filter AFR auto-feedback buster.

So, what's SRT like? Apart from the preamp's rather feeble gain, it's the most impressive onboard imaging system we've heard to date. The images are musical and usable up to high ratios of mic-to-pickup, and it's only when running at near-maximum mic that artificiality begins to creep in. The quality of the new piezo pickup impresses too. Add all this to the lavishly-appointed APX, and it's a double hit for Yamaha's long-running stage electro.

Yamaha's SRT blends the undersaddle signal with virtual microphone images. It's very impressive

Reviewed July 21/9 £530

Contact: Go To Guitars 01925 444696
Web: www.gotoguitars.com

BREEDLOVE OM/CMe H-H

Deciphering this OM's tortuous catalogue designation reveals that 'CM' means solid spruce/mahogany, 'e' indicates electro, and 'H-H' signifies herringbone inlays for the top purfling and soundhole rosette. Unlike 'Original Design' Breedloves with their pointy headstocks and so on, this one's a 'Revival' with more staid accoutrements such as a belly bridge, spade peghead with open tuners and, inside, pre-war-style bracing. The neck is of regular span, not fingerstyle width, but 55mm string spacing at the bridge allows accurate picking. The guitar's two-band VTC preamp is a cinch, and especially impressive is the auto-chromatic tuner which uses a virtual needle indicator. It's accurate, well-lit, can be used unplugged, and mutes the output. The system has plenty of gain, the bass and treble bands are sensibly ranged, and the result is a high-quality sound palette. Acoustically, the OM is a rewardingly dynamic player, simultaneously warm and bright, with excellent cross-string clarity. Non-cut OM electros aren't exactly plentiful, making this well-priced Breedlove even more desirable if a cutaway isn't a must-have for you.

Acoustically the OM/CMe is a dynamic player, warm yet bright, and the two-band VTC preamp is a cinch

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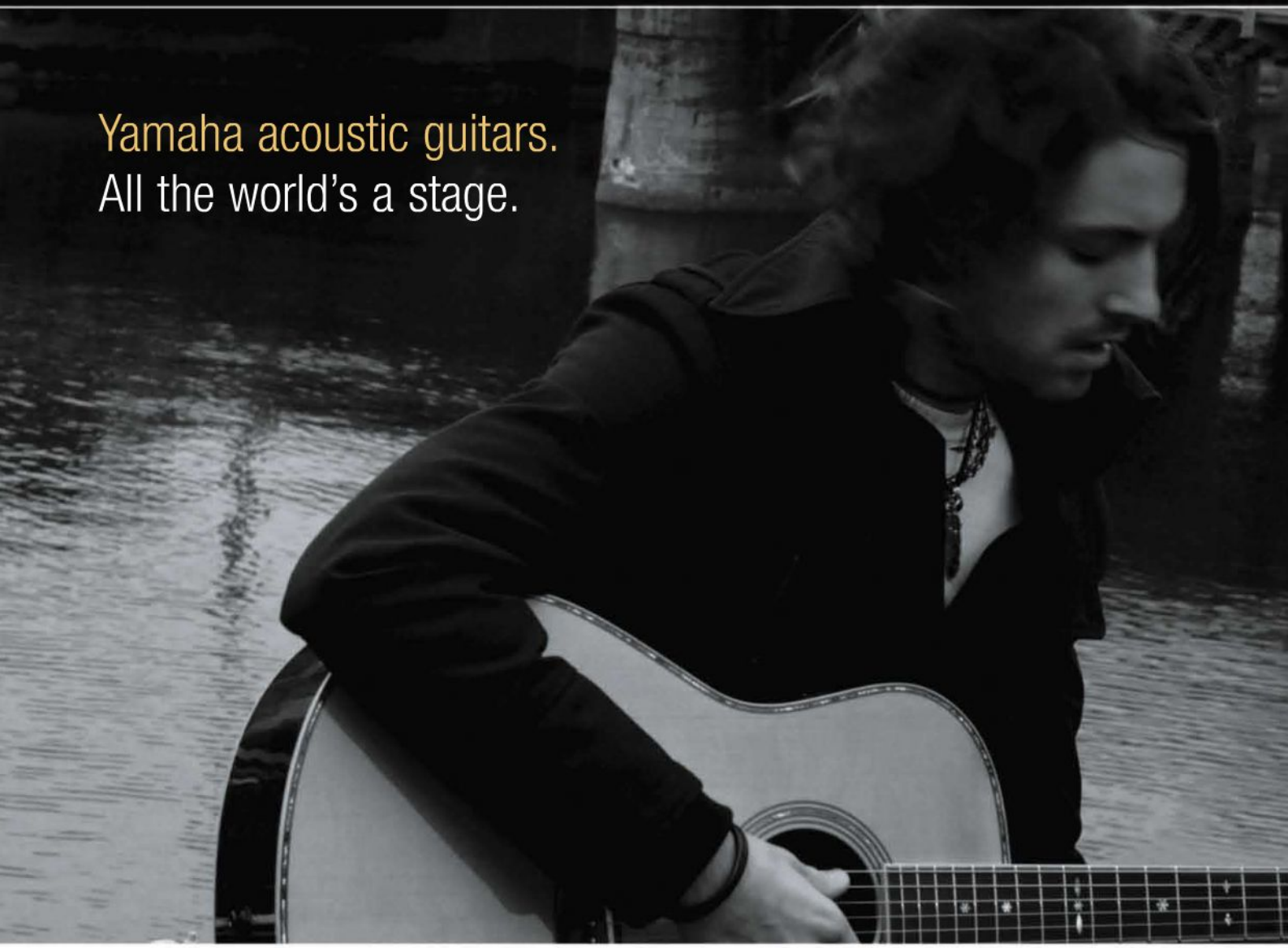

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ONE HOT MOTHA

From spanking clean tones through rich and responsive crunch to full-blown high-gain mayhem, the Hayden MoFo does it all. Visit the new Hayden MoFo website and discover the all-valve 30-Watt guitar amp head that Biffy Clyro's Simon Neil describes as 'a real mother******.

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Hayden

haydenamps.com

WINNER

HIWATT MAXWATT GR100

Reviewed: March 21/05 £225

Looking indistinguishable from a classic valve Hiwatt, with channel-switching, reverb, and a big bright sound at an extremely attractive price, there's plenty to support our view that the GR100 is virtually unbeatable for the money. It's the kind of value – and solid sonic support – that could encourage a player to take the plunge and get an earlier start in live work than previously possible.

By the latest standards the GR100 has relatively few onboard toys, but unless your sound depends on modulated effects there's not much missing; the overdrive and reverb are more than adequate, and there's always the effects loop for those who do. The less obvious bonus is that the GR100 stands up uncannily well to direct playing comparisons with veteran valve battlehorses not only from Hiwatt themselves but from other famous brands as well. In fact it would be hard to determine by ear that the GR100 was not a valve-powered combo, and its owner will have little to fear from the snobbery of valve-amp-owning friends or rivals.

It's a changing world, and who knows if one day we may not all be playing through this amp – or something very like it. Sound, build and styling get the GR100 into our top three contenders for 2010, but the value factor makes it the winner.

Contact: Music Ground/Hiwatt Sales 01302 330429
Web: www.hiwatt.co.uk

Reviewed: June 21/08 £949

Beneath Vai's signature is a powerful, flexible three channel amp with enough volume to kill squirrels as they leap between trees

Contact: Rock Solid 0871 890 3022
Web: www.guitarsampsdrums.com

CARVIN LEGACY II VL2100

If you're in the market for a high end amp and come across the VL2100 in a shop, you'll either wet yourself with excitement or stroll hurriedly past. Why? Because of the heavy association with a certain Mr Vai. Believe us, though, to ignore it because of that connection would be foolish, as beneath the signature is a powerful and flexible amp that boasts three immensely usable channels and enough gain and volume to kill squirrels as they leap between trees. Vai already had his own signature Carvin amp, so in an attempt to improve on that successful model he brought in Benjamin Fargen to completely tweak and rework the innards. The name of Fargen is big news if you love modded plexi tones, and the result is an amp that does just that little bit more than expected from a mass production unit.

There's now a third 'boosted clean' channel, three selectable output levels and a hidden feature which beautifully mimics a flat-out valve tone, gain-adjusted by your guitar volume pot. That's where the true strength of this amp lies, in delivering an outstanding valve-driven sound that has been refined into a class product by a talented trio of a good manufacturer, an amp genius and a world-class player.

Reviewed: January 21/03 £899

If you want a superb-sounding combo with a full menu of valve-generated overdrive the Series One 45 is unbeatable at the price

Contact: Blackstar Amplification 01536 312620
Web: www.blackstaramps.com

BLACKSTAR SERIES ONE 45

The Series One 45 combo is an evolutionary step on from the established Artisan series, with clean/overdrive channel switching, MIDI and a continuously-variable DPR power scaling feature. There's a high-tech element too, with microcontroller management of the main functions ensuring smooth running and better reliability. Also, as a name that's fast becoming associated with newly-emerging bands at the high end of the business, it's good to see that Blackstar's new amp is priced in the same three-figure category as the established ones.

If this award was just for sound, the 45 would probably win by a hair. It has more of the class AB oomph of Marshall or Hiwatt than the Artisan, which is tuned for the Vox/Matchless/Badcat market. This amp shares that emphasis on overdrive and absence of reverb, but the variable-level loop takes care of all outboard effects. The Artisan is a tough act to follow, but if you want a superb-sounding combo with a full menu of valve-generated overdrive including early power-stage saturation, the Series One 45 is unbeatable at its price.

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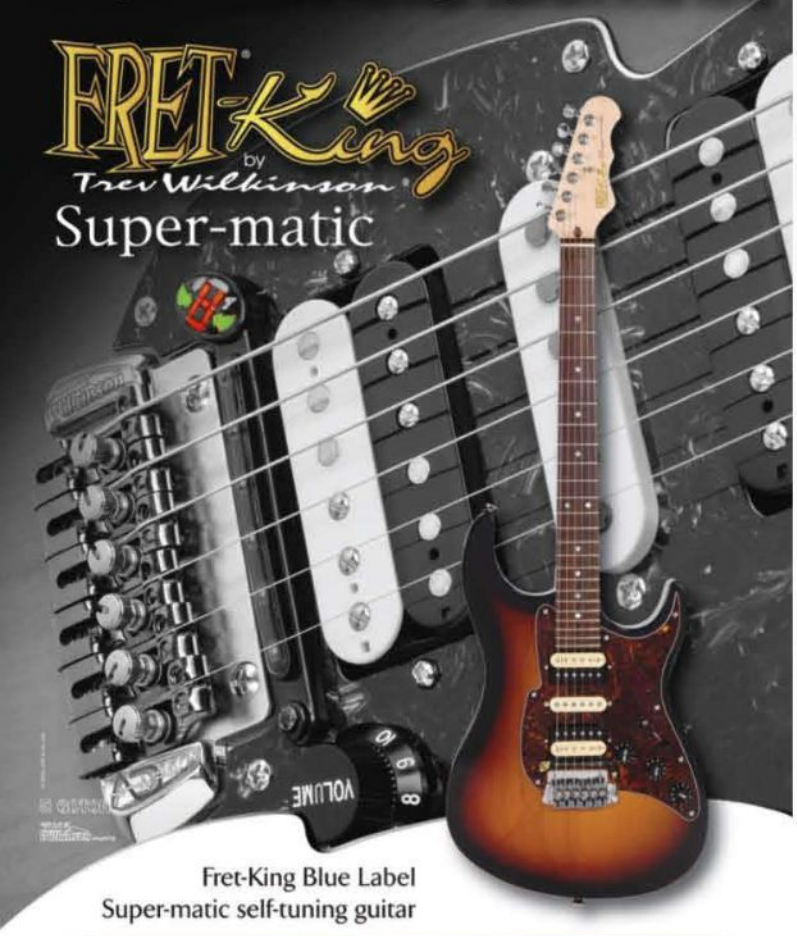

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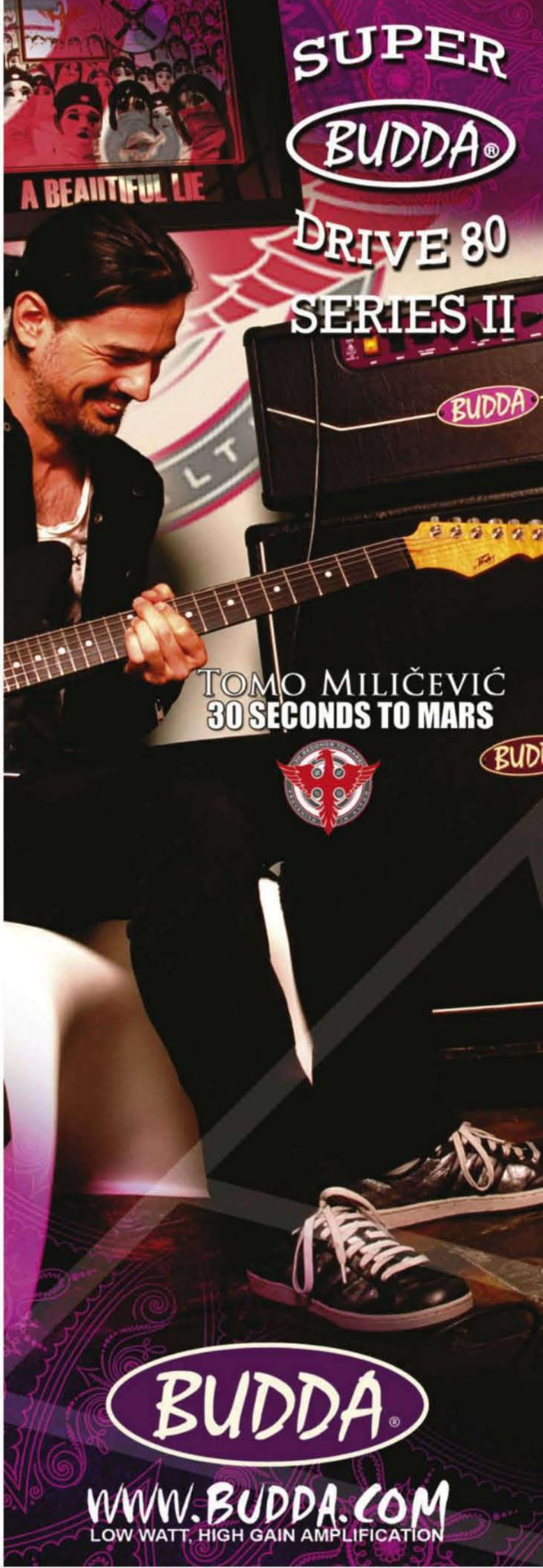

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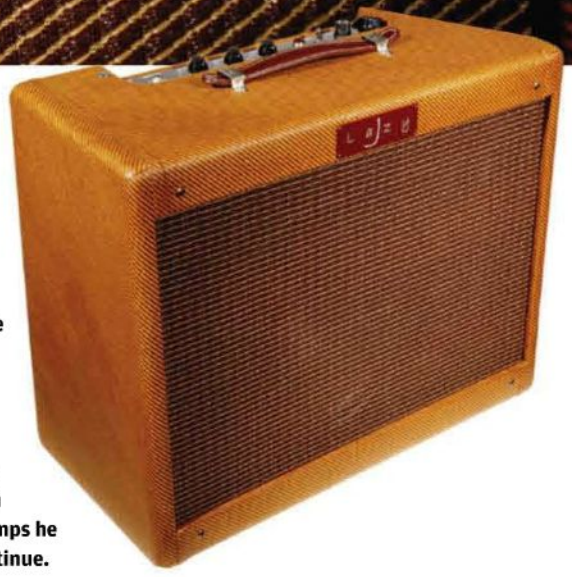
WINNER Guitar Awards 2010 Best Guitar Amp Over £1000

LAZY J 20

Reviewed: May 21/07
£1249



Lazy J hit the ground running. When we reviewed this update on the 5E3 tweed Deluxe, builder Jesse Hoff could already name Doyle Bramhall II and Pete Townshend as customers. Six months later Joe Walsh, Joe Bonamassa, Mike Campbell, Paul Weller and Noel Gallagher can be added to the list.

So what's the big deal about Lazy J amps? You might suppose it's the ultra high-quality components wired point-to-point on traditional eyelet board. Maybe it's because power levels have been raised from 12W to a more giggable 20W thanks to 6L6 power tubes and a beefier output transformer. Or perhaps it's the incomparable Celestion Blue speaker and the bypassable attenuation control for cranked-up tone at practice levels. Our review amp came with switchable mid-boost and a valve-driven spring reverb, with reverb Level and Tone controls mounted inside the handmade finger-jointed pine cabinet. You can opt for a valve tremolo, too.

Lazy J's popularity is probably down to a combination of all these factors, but we think the true explanation is Hoff's passion. In this era of massive corporations with huge offshore production facilities, here's a man who just wants to make the best amps he possibly can to please his customers. Old-fashioned? Certainly, but long may he continue.

Contact: Lazy J 08432 894089
Web: www.lazyjprojects.com

Reviewed: September 21/11 £1799

From the people who made VHT, the Sig X responds like a great vintage amp and really delivers the goods at any volume level

Contact: Stormshadow Toneworks 07882 930679
Web: www.sfdamp.com

FRYETTE SIG X

Fryette amps come from the same people who made the original VHT amps. The Sig X has three channels - Lead, Rhythm and Clean. Lead has a three-way voicing switch - Brown for smoothness and balance, Brit for upper mid emphasis and Blow, like Brit but with added low mids. Options for Rhythm include Vintage for warm roundness, Live for liveliness with slight grit, and Burn with added low midrange.

The clean channel has a range of equalisation controls but only one Volume control. A Fat/Open switch shapes the midrange and the input voicings are Bloom, Brite and Spank. All channels have individual Presence and Depth controls as well as Power Shift, which usefully drops the KT88 power valve output from 100W to 40W by switching from solid state rectification to a 5U4G valve. A foot controller provides individual channel switching, plus boost and effects loop switches.

This amp proved very simple to operate and it's easy to venture far beyond the generic to create your own overdrive and crunch sounds. With its beautiful clean tones, the Sig X's range seems infinite. It responds to playing dynamics like a great vintage amp and really delivers the goods at any volume level.

Reviewed: November 22/01 £1432

The Super-Sonic 60 will provide more than enough gain for Fender amp lovers, and the cleaner tones will make us feel at home

Contact: Fender UK 01342 331700
Web: www.fender.co.uk

FENDER SUPER-SONIC 60

This amp was designed to provide Fender fans with contemporary overdrive and distortion as well as the sparkly cleans they love. Two 12AT7s, three 12AX7s and a pair of 6L6s generate 60W of power for the Celestion G12 Vintage 30. A foot controller performs Vintage/Burn, effects loop and Vibrolux/Bassman mode switching, but there's no spring reverb switch.

The clean channel modes are based on the mid-'60s Vibrolux and Bassman, and switching makes a huge difference to clean headroom, bass response and volume. Burn channel gain levels massively exceed anything you could extract from any old Fender, but you can still dial up overdriven blues, '70s rock and fusion tones as well as fuzzy effects and metal crunch.

Open-back cabinets aren't ideal for high-gain crunch, so if über-tight metal and shred tones are your priority you'd be better off with a Sonic 60 head and a matching Fender 2x12" or 4x12" infinite baffle cabinet. However, the Super-Sonic 60 will provide more than enough gain for most Fender amp lovers... and the cleaner tones will make us all feel right at home.

John "JD" DeServio of Black Label Society.
Hartke Headquarters | Hauppauge, NY | February 8th, 2010

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WINNER Guitar Awards 2010 Best Acoustic Amp

VOX AGA70

Reviewed November 22/1 £317

Compactness with giggable power has been a theme for acoustic amps this year, and this stylish little retro-esque 70W Vox adds a further – and rare – attraction by having one of its two channels valve-driven (using a 12AU7). That aside, the facilities on each are identical including gain-switchable jack and XLR ins, 15V phantom powering, three-band EQ plus a gently scooping Contour control, reverb level, clip LED and a preset chorus. The master section offers an Anti-Feedback rotary and a Mute switch... great for mid-set tuning tweaks as it doesn't kill the output from the amp's Tuner Out. Other rear-panel connectors include stereo line-in jacks and an Aux In.

The combo delivers ample welly and spread via its 6.5" speaker, and the sounds throughout are encouragingly natural, with smoothly responsive EQ. The chorus is a high-quality medium modulation. The amp's big plus is how the Tube Pre channel really extends the applications, adding subtle extra warmth and compressive expression, not only for regular electro performance but even, by appropriate EQ'ing, with a humbuckered semi for mellow, jazzy tones. This is versatility beyond the call of duty, making the AGA70 a must-try.

Contact: Vox Amplification 01908 857130
Web: www.voxamps.com

Highly Recommended

Reviewed August 21/10 £359

This super-portable mains/battery stereo combo has some tricks up its sleeve, including a 40-second looper and anti-feedback

Contact: Roland UK 01792 702701
Web: www.roland.co.uk

ROLAND AC-33

This super-portable, mains/battery-powered, 2x15W stereo combo is a play-anywhere practice-cum-busking package that keeps its weight under 5kg by using AA batteries (eight alkalines or rechargeables) instead of a heavy internally fixed unit. It's an amp with some tricks up its sleeve, too. How about a 40-second phrase looper with the facility for doing multiple overdubs? It's simple to operate via the onboard buttons, even easier if using optional Boss footswitches. There's also a reasonably effective auto anti-feedback and two preset choruses (Wide, Space) which, being Roland, are excellent, as is the digital reverb/delay.

Running twin 5" speakers, the AC-33 has two channels with three-band and two-band EQ respectively, and the sound is high quality, clean and unforced. Guitar-channel volume is reasonable for the power rating, and a few more decibels can be extracted by using the Mic/Line channel (as long you don't mind forgoing a midrange control). In brief, this is a versatile, fine-sounding little amp that's as useful as it is great fun.

Reviewed July 21/9 £389

The weeny Lunchbox Acoustic boasts 130W, two channels and a digital reverb – and it's pretty loud for such a little fella

Contact: Aria UK, 01483 238720
Web: www.ariauk.com

ZT LUNCHBOX ACOUSTIC

Though the Lunchbox Acoustic weighs just 12lbs and has a weeny cabinet under 10" wide containing just one 6.5" speaker, it manages to pack a steroidal 130W RMS - some power-to-size ratio! Two channels are shoehorned in, each providing two-band EQ and a level control for a digital reverb, and the mic channel includes switchable 12V phantom powering.

In the master section is a three-position anti-feedback rotary, relying on predetermined frequencies not search-and-destroy. Ancillary connectors are generous: an Aux In, FX loop and a line/headphone out with volume control. The combo accepts an external speaker - useful, but unfortunately it's either/or, since both speakers can't be run simultaneously.

Assuming your instrument system is reasonably gainful, the amp is pretty darn loud for such a little fella, with a quite neutral and natural tonality. The only minor disappointment is the anti-feedback, which proves hit and miss. Still, when it comes to extracting quarts from pint pots, the ZT largely succeeds and is much more than its practice-amp dimensions suggest.

DT50 GUITAR AMPLIFIER

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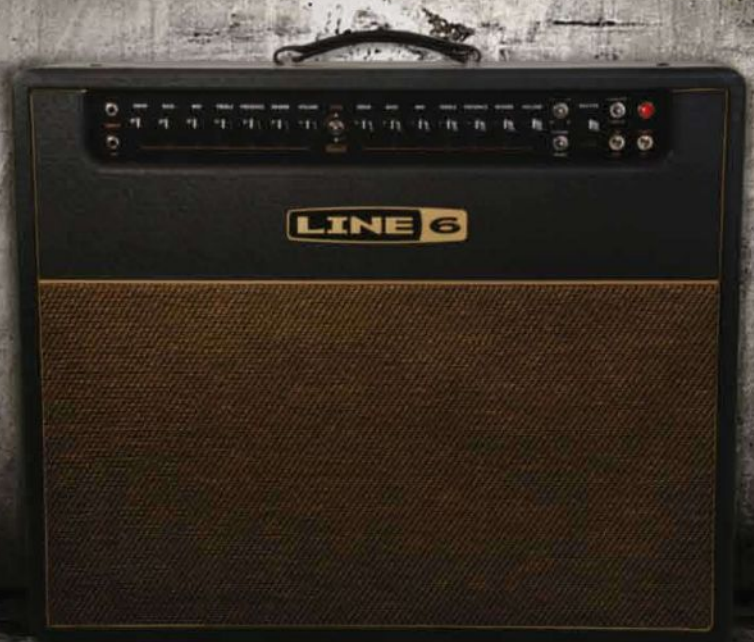

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Photo by Alison Krick

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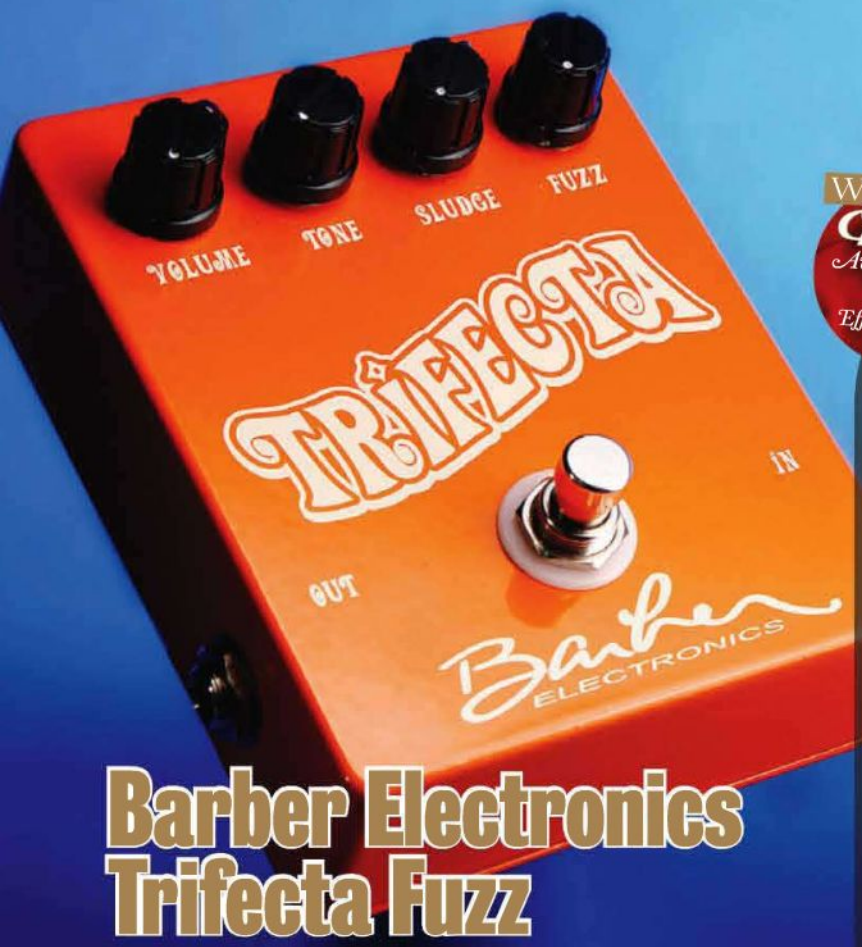

Barber Electronics Trifecta Fuzz

Reviewed January 21/03 £149

Fuzz is back in a large way, and the Barber Trifecta is a damn good one. Most fuzzes do one thing; this pedal does three. Click the toggle left, and you get close to a Big Muff sound. Flip to the middle, the 'Jumbo Bender' slot, and you'll find a superb lower-gain sound with great note definition. Hit it right, and you'll discover 'Suppa Blender', a fine spot for higher fuzz levels, droning chords and squishy attack when soloing. The scope and responsiveness of the EQ is a big factor in this pedal's versatility. You can clearly discern the changes as you sweep Tone and the Sludge HPF, and you can combine them for singing raspiness with cool band pass filter effects. For clean-up from the guitar's volume pot or for voltage starvation stutters, look elsewhere... but most of your other fuzzy fantasies are here.

Contact: Strings Direct 01702 540068
Web: www.barberelectronics.com

Reviewed February 21/4 £485

Contact: Mark Dunn, mail@steelmixer.com
Web: http://steelmixer.com

TELONICS FP-100 VOLUME PEDAL

Nearly 500 quid? For a *volume* pedal? Yes - but if swell control is an important part of your style, you'll know all about the drawbacks of pot pedals (short lifespan, treble suck) and LED pedals (a gig in bright sunlight? Whoops). This works in an entirely new way, sensing the changing angle between base and treadle. Built in Arizona by the owner of a successful hi-tech company who has aimed all his electronics know-how at a range of pedal steel amplification products, the 24v-powered FP-100 is over-engineered like a piece of lightweight military-spec hardware. It has a butter-smooth action and comes with two outs, a tuner out and the unique ability to replicate the exact audio tapers of the best-known volume pedals of the past. It also has a USB port for updates, controllable impedance, optional 'remote' operation via a widget you can fit on a hat, and user-settable 'on points' for all tapers. It's a fabulous piece of gear, and the last volume pedal you'll ever need.

With a creamy sound, a choice of audio tapers and built to the very highest quality, this is the finest volume pedal in the world

Reviewed June 21/8 £199

Contact: JHS 01132 865381
Web: www.jhs.co.uk

MXR M82 BASS ENVELOPE FILTER

An envelope filter is a kind of automatic wah-wah that uses the dynamics of the input signal to control the frequency cut-off and resonance of the sound. It's especially effective on bass, and the MXR M82 delivers classic analogue envelope filter sounds for that exact task. This reissue of the popular '70s classic comes in a lightweight aluminium Phase 90-sized box, so you shouldn't have trouble finding some space on your pedalboard. The five knobs are Dry, Effect, Decay, Q, and Sensitivity; the separate Dry and Effect controls allow you to balance the direct and effected signal, very helpful for not losing sonic weight. This pedal will produce a variety of exciting sounds, all with a superb signal-to-noise ratio. Think Bootsy Collins to Flea... quacking funk sounds, thin almost-synthy tones, and big filter sweeps. Then set the sensitivity low and you get that real subby/dub reggae sound that will really shake trouser legs through a fat PA. You won't regret this purchase.

The harder you hit, the quackier and squonkier your sound. Just add fuzz for the ultimate '70s funk bass experience

Reviewed September 21/11 £230

Contact: Owen Electronics 0161 794 7731
Web: www.owenelectronics.co.uk

OWEN ELECTRONICS BASS BOMB DRIVER

Handcrafted in the UK, with two switchable channels and containing a specially-selected vacuum tube, the Owen Electronics Bass Bomb Driver claims to shape 'any bass drive sound on the planet'. Guess what? They're not far wrong. If you want overdrive, distortion, fuzz or just a low-gain bass booster, the Bass Bomb provides it all. Two switchable channels is a great feature for playing live, as it allows you to craft different drive tones and readily switch between them. Also applicable to the switchable channels are the versatile EQ options of bass cut, mid boost and hi lift. The valve is a unique triode/pentode design apparently unused in any other pedal or amp, and this results in a truly unique set of sounds, and a kind of overdrive you just can't get with any of the solid-state competitors. Dynamic, original, ballsy and great for stage or studio - you want this pedal in your life.

Built in Manchester, the Bass Bomb is a twin-channel valve overdrive that'll deliver nearly all the different dirt flavours you need

Reviewed October 21/12 £249

Contact: JHS 01132 865 381
Web: www.jhs.co.uk

FISHMAN AURA SIXTEEN

Fishman's Aura Acoustic Imaging technology is designed to restore a studio-mic'ed sound to your acoustic's undersaddle or soundhole pickup. This high-quality box has a simple Volume and Blend control with a 16-way rotary preset switch. All the 'images' are dreadnoughts, but don't worry - a USB port connects the Sixteen to your computer and you can download images from Fishman's 800-strong Image Gallery. We were soon enjoying parlour, gypsy jazz, resonator and slot-head sounds. A familiarisation period and quite a bit of fine tuning is required to get things happening but the benefits of the imaging are obvious, with a dramatic transformation from a tone that clearly originated from a pickup towards something convincingly 'acoustic' in nature. The playing dynamics are extremely natural, and the Aura Sixteen made our guitar sound infinitely better. It really is like having 16 guitars in a stompbox.

Keep your regular guitar and your usual pickup – this box can provide a wealth of convincing and authentic acoustic sounds

Reviewed November 22/1 £215

Contact: Westside Distribution 0141 248 4812
Web: www.t-rex-effects.com

T-REX MUDHONEY II

Whether you're familiar with the single version of the Mudhoney or not, it won't take you long to see the benefit of having two of 'em stuffed in one box. Suitably enough, the distortion on offer is as thick as mud and as sweet as honey... at least when you turn the gain up way past noon. At cooler settings it's actually a fairly transparent overdrive that peps up your midrange beautifully at the expense of a little low-end warmth, much like a Tube Screamer. And now, thanks to the Mudhoney II's pair of identically-voiced channels, both of these sonic landscapes are just a toe-tap away - there's never been a more elegant way to jump between clean, gritty and downright filthy tones when playing through a single-channel amp. The switchable boost is a nicely judged addition... and how did T-Rex fit six knobs, two toggles and two footswitches on one compact pedal without making it feel untidy or cramped? It's miraculous.

The regular Mudhoney was great: having two in one box is the next best thing to having a footswitchable three-channel amp

Reviewed March 21/5 £89

Contact: Headstock 0121 508 6666
Web: www.ibanez.com

IBANEZ SB7 SYNTHESIZER BASS

For bass players who need to tackle dreaded synths or sequencers, the Ibanez SB7 is worth shouting about. It's from the Tone Lok series, which means all four controls neatly retract, locking your settings in place. As well as Volume, there's Sensitivity, Frequency and Resonance: these control dynamic response, frequency bias and the sharpness of the edge of the sound. Two switches offer different synth settings or auto wah, and slow or fast decay. It's an excellent selection of features - and the sounds are good, too. There's a gurgling auto wah variation, with mucho added nastiness from fooling with the Resonance, and the two synth sounds range from brooding keyboard bass to buzzsaw fuzz to a lighter, more lead-oriented sound with bags of edgy fizz. The SB7 is easy to use and ruggedly constructed and offers a surprisingly wide range of synthesised nastiness. At just under £90, it's a risk well worth taking.

For futuristic bass explorers, this pedal lets you out-gun the keyboard player with a host of gloopy, buzzy, plastic fantastic sounds

From dirt to delay to indescribable craziness, these are our favourite noise makers of the past year

Reviewed August 21/10 £135

Contact: info@ehx.com
Web: www.ehx.com

ELECTRO-HARMONIX RING THING MINI

Ring modulators so often seem like a good-idea-at-the-time kind of purchase and all too often end up in the dark corners of a flightcase or clogging up eBay... so why include Electro-Harmonix's new Ring Thing Mini in our Gear Of The Year? Simple: this one is a cut above. Gone is the uncontrollable wayward fizz, aggravating atonal crackle and broken buzz that only a Dalek could love; instead you'll discover a refined variety of sounds from slanted soundscapes to upper and lower-band sorcery. The presets are excellent, the pitch shift runs amok over a four-octave range, and there's plenty of fun to be had should you wish to add an expression pedal. Add precise fine-tuning capabilities and a handy button that 'tunes' your desired effect, and you'll be making room in your pedalboard before you can say 'heterodyned waveform oscillation'. One for the brave, but what's life without a few risks now and then? Go for it!

From chilly electronica to Radiohead ambience to weird sci-fi effects, this is a ring modulator that's actually worth the trouble

Reviewed March 21/5 £18.99

Contact: Gear4Music 0843 155 0800
Web: www.gear4music.com

BELCAT DLY-503

Once upon a time, we lobbed our 300ms analogue delays in the cupboard and bought digital. Not any more. Dark, grainy echoes are all the rage, and the Belcat is crazy cheap. No digital-style pin-sharp sounds or two-second delays here, then, but bear in mind that it's quieter and cleaner than most bucket brigade delay devices... a bit like an analogue/digital marriage. The brightness and the hint of glassy fuzz in the upper mids will suit rockabilly players. At minimum Time settings you get a fast slapback; set Repeat to generate a halo of spaghetti western reverb, then tweak the Time knob for early Edgisms and loopy psychedelia – though the DLY-503 doesn't do endless delay feedback at top whack (always a good trick). You can get lusher analogue-style pedals, but at far heftier price. This one is pretty convincing, and it makes single notes sing. It's something special, and for less than £20 it's downright amazing.

You can easily spend £200 on a boutique analogue delay. This one does almost the same job for the price of a round at the bar

Reviewed April 21/06 £140

Contact: Futuresounds 00353 1 613 9555
Web: www.pigtronix.com

PIGTRONIX ARIA DISNORTION

Designed for sweet and creamy distortion and painted by famed pedal-dauber Myrold, the Disnortion features 'dynamic diode clipping architecture' and a three-band EQ. It ships with an 18v supply, but it can run on a 9v supply too. Batteries aren't an option.

Using this pedal in anger with a full band reveals its tone-shaping power and its ability to enhance playability. It doesn't squeeze the life out of your sound. Play lightly, and things clean up; dig in, and a tube-like sag accompanies the increase in distortion. When you hold a note, it gets a second wind and blooms into a rounded shape after the initial attack. It's hard to make it sound harsh, but on subtle overdrive settings there's an undercurrent of fuzziness and at the other extreme the near-fuzzbox tones retain an appealing transparency. The Disnortion isn't pure retro but even with the mids scooped it's far from a modern crunch box.

Smooth, clear and refined, this distortion pedal stacks well with other boosts or overdrives and blooms at stage volumes

Reviewed March 21/4 £379

Contact: Line 6 UK 01327 302700
Web: www.line6.com

LINE 6 M9

There's a lot to be said for having over 100 effects in one unit. The problem is, with many digital multi-FX units that convenience is compromised by the sheer ball-ache of finding your way through the forest of knobs, buttons and menu screens that control the bloody things. Much credit is due to Line 6, then, for taking a step back from their usual cram-it-all-in philosophy to produce something that might just appeal to the digital sceptic. The M9 is a fairly compact black box with seven footswitches, six knobs and a small screen that's super-easy to navigate. It covers all the bases, from Rat-type distortion to tape-style delay via a healthy blast of synth-squelch lunacy, and while some of the 'classic' fuzzes fall short of the real thing, the modulations, filters and echoes are just about universally awesome. The only downside is that you can never use more than three effects at once... but hey, let's not be greedy.

One-third the size of the M13, the M9 offers 24 scenes and three effects at once. It's a great multi-FX for the minimally-minded

Photog. Neil Zlozower - Graphics : letoutredebenjamin@yahoo.fr

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BEST ACCESSORIES 2010

Here are the finest guitar and bass accessories we came across in 2010. Christmas is coming – so slyly leave the mag open at this page

Reviewed February 21/4 £59.95

Contact: Logjam Music 01544 388433
Web: www.log-jam.co.uk

LOGJAM LOGARHYTHM

From programming drum machines to kicking old cardboard boxes, there are a few ways the sticksman-free musical combo can knock out a beat. We think the most satisfying method is with this, the Logarhythm. It's simple to use: just plug it into a spare amp and tap out the tempo with a free foot. You can get quite a range of thuds and smacks from this simple bit of kit by altering how you stomp, where you stomp and what kind of shoes you stomp with - and if you accessorise with the Wedge (£6.95) or Heel'nToe board (£19.95) the selection of sounds is broadened still. Since we tested the Logarhythm back in February there have been a few small changes: the price has gone up by a tenner to just under £60, but now you can choose from four different woods - the original sapele, cherry, walnut, or maple. It might not be for everybody - the Logarhythm won't cut through the mix of a hard rock outfit - but for singer/songwriters and other performers looking for subtle percussive sounds, it's hard to beat.

A superb secret weapon for self-propelled solo artists, especially downhome bluesers who love John Lee Hooker and Seasick Steve

Reviewed: February 21/4 £199 & £77

Contact: Madison & Fifth 01858 446782
Web: www.madisonandfifth.co.uk

MONO M80-2B DUAL BASS & M80-EG HYBRID ELECTRIC GUITAR CASE

The Chinese-made M80-2B twin bass case and M80-EG hybrid electric guitar case are two excellent examples of Mono's extensive range. Made from a waterproof polyester-type fabric called sharkskin, the bags have panels made from ABS, a light, rigid, durable thermoplastic, and there's a layer of high density foam designed to dissipate impact. The top of the neck is secured on a foam block and there are three pockets for accessories; given their size, it's surprising the cases only weigh 8lbs and 5lbs each. Ours were black, but there's also an appealing steel grey finish. As well as shoulder straps, there's a further strap that fastens across your chest making it much more stable, and the internal foam block neck brace system means your guitar is locked in place even when running for a bus. It's a lightweight, super-durable package. Surely your guitar or bass deserves some proper protection like this.

If a gigbag is the answer to your transport problems, then these superior items will protect your precious instruments as much as possible

Reviewed: September 21/11 £12.99

Contact: Sutherland Trading Co Ltd 02920 887 333
Web: www.sutherlandtrading.com

CRAFTER TS-10 DIGITAL CLIP-ON HEADSTOCK TUNER

Clip-on headstock tuners have surged in popularity recently, and Crafter's TS-10 is an especially good example of the breed. Like all the others, it works by picking up the string's vibration through a clamp and has rubber pads that guard your instrument from scratching. It's made in China, is small enough to weigh less than a medium-sized ant and, at a smidgin under 13 quid, is the cheapest of its kind that we've encountered thus far.

The TS-10 is easy to use and looks rather cool. The 'On' button on the back also selects Chromatic, Guitar, Bass or Ukulele modes. Once clipped on, simply swivel to view a screen that's grey when inactive, amber when you're out of tune and green when you're in, the latter further confirmed by a small green light just above the screen. It's easy to read, stable and secure, and even reads a low B bass string. Who could ask for more?

Unobtrusive and just as good on acoustics as electrics, this headstock tuner tells your audience that you love their sensitive ears

Reviewed: July 21/9 From £64.50

Contact: Madison & Fifth 01858 446 782
Web: www.madisonandfifth.co.uk

PEDALSNAKE MULTICORE SYSTEM

We love the PedalSnake multicore system because it's the answer to many multi-stompbox users' cabling conundrums. It's made by American company Stage Magic, and at the system's heart is the Base Snake, a multicore cable either 18 or 24 feet in length with a thick rubber skin. The cable contains either four or seven internally-shielded channels with handy colour coding, which carry bass or guitar signals, MIDI and varied DC power through the same loom. You customise the system via a selection of Pigtails called GLines or PLines, with the former comprising ¼" jack-type connectors and the latter 2.1mm power connectors.

The Base Snake is £51 and prices for the Pigtails run from £13.50 to £21. Breakdown and reassembly are very straightforward and speedy processes, especially as the Base Snake can be left coiled inside your pedalboard case. It's brilliantly put together, reliable and noise-free, and enables the FX crazy amongst you to put their system in order.

Tangled in stage spaghetti? The PedalSnake carries audio and low-voltage power in one neat cable, leaving the clutter behind your amp

BASS COLLECTION
JIVE BASS

WINNER

Our enthusiasm for Leo Fender's original bass templates remains undimmed, and it's heartwarming to come across a tribute as good as the Bass Collection Jive Bass. Made in Korea, it has the familiar sexy offset basswood body with vintage-correct details such as a chrome pickup cover and an expansive mint green pickguard. There's a selection of period-correct finishes available, all matched in nostalgic '60s style on the headstock face (we think the metallic red finish is especially sumptuous). The attention to detail is great, it's more lightweight than you'd expect, and the slim maple/rosewood neck is super-fast to play.

Passive electronics are the order of the day, and the two vintage-style single coils give access to some excellent J-style tones. Both pickups together give glittering harmonics plus width, punch and crunchiness in the bottom end. There's an earthy growl from the neck pickup with a rubbery, acoustic midrange, pleasingly even highs, and a fat, burpy gurgle from the bridge. The Jive is a worthy winner in our sub-£1000 category: it may not look or sound very individual, but its quality competes with that of basses costing twice the price.

Reviewed July 21/09
£295

Contact: House Music Ltd 020 7357 7703
E-mail: sales@house.gb.net

Reviewed July 21/09 £295

Contact: House Music Ltd 020 7357 7703
E-mail: sales@house.gb.net

BASS COLLECTION POWER BASS

All P-bass copies are not, we've found, alike... not by a long shot. We really liked Bass Collection's Power Bass, the sister to the excellent Jive. It, too, has a slimmed-down, instantly recognisable basswood body and proper vintage-correct details in the form of the 'solar flare' finish and a sweeping mint green pickguard. We loved the chrome bridge cover – it's the essence of '60s soul (and easily removed). The bolt-on maple neck with its rosewood fingerboard is slick and speedy, and the overall playability is quite un-Precision-like. The passive EMG-style split-coil humbucker is linked to one volume and one tone control, and this familiar combination spits out an excellent version of the famous sound. Lows are gritty and snarling, the midrange is full, clean and solid, and the highs are spiky with plenty of natural-sounding definition. Backing off the tone throws a silky sheet over proceedings and, most satisfyingly, renders the thinner strings useable for melodic parts. All in all, the Power Bass has the P-Bass essentials all present and correct. It's a budget package that punches way above its weight.

The Power Bass has all the period-correct details. We love the bridge cover – it's the essence of '60s soul

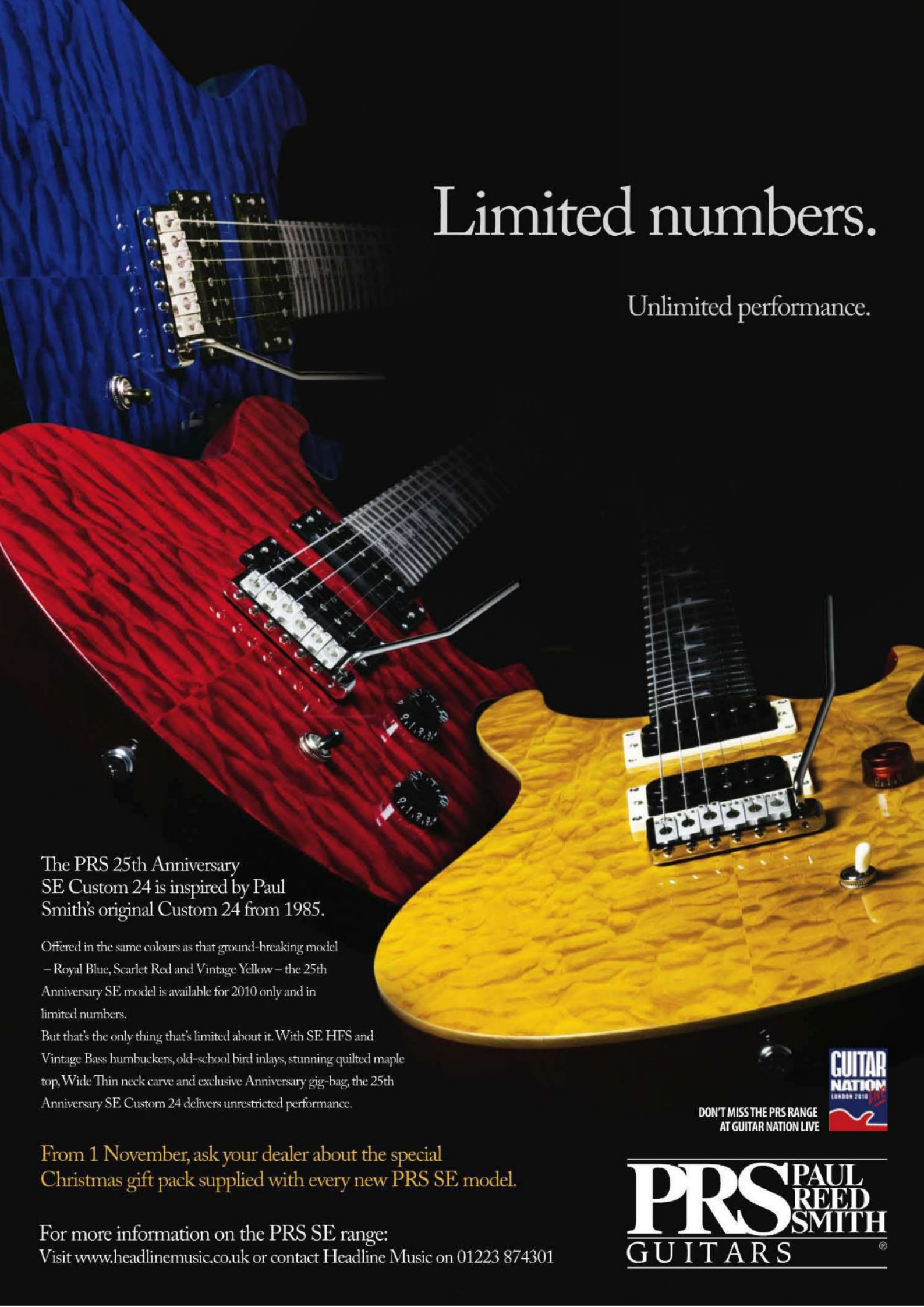
Reviewed: February 21/4 £419.99

Contact: Fender GB&I 01342 331700
Web: www.squierguitars.com

SQUIER JAMES JOHNSTON JAZZ BASS

Biffy Clyro bassist Johnston's Squier signature bass is partly a replica of his USA-built Fender and partly a variation on the Classic Vibe Jazz Bass '60s we reviewed in 2009. It's further evidence of the current high quality of budget Fender replicas, although this one emanates from the source itself via China. The basswood body shape is bang-on correct and finished in glossy Lake Placid blue with a mint green pickguard and matching headstock face with a subtle Biffy Clyro logo (Johnston's signature also adorns the back). The maple/rosewood neck is just the ticket, the fretting is fine, and it's worth drawing your attention to the High Mass bridge with its funky brass saddles. Your playing goes through a pair of passive Custom Jazz Bass single coils which produce a tone rich in harmonics with a joyful crunch on the open strings; it's full-range and really very versatile. Upgrade the pickups, the pots and the jack if you like, but there's a strong argument for simply keeping it stock and doing your darndest to play it to death. This is a genuinely good-quality budget Jazz that'll have the Squier scoffers eating humble pie, with chips.

This is a genuinely good-quality budget Jazz that'll have the Squier scoffers eating humble pie



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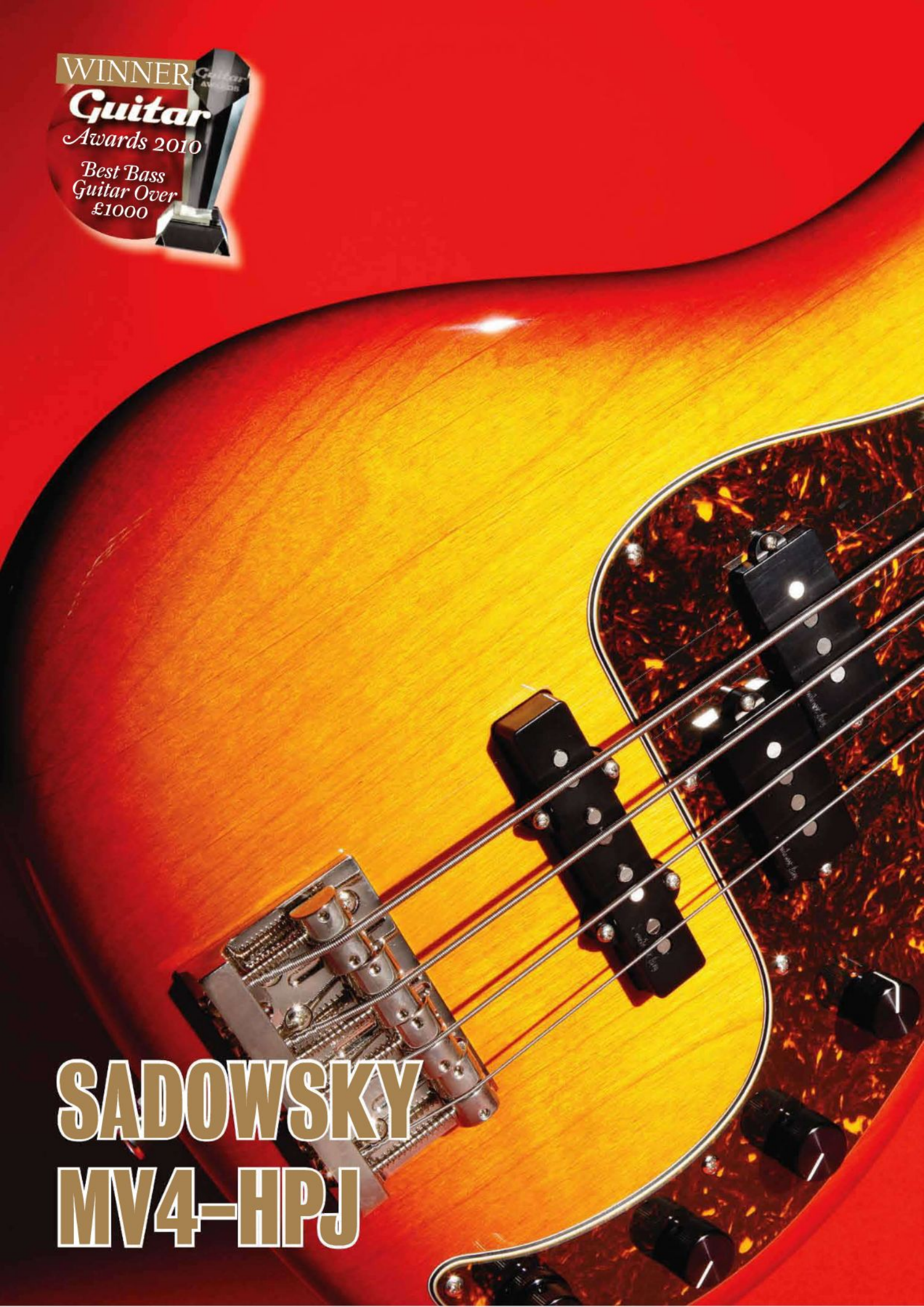
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SADOWSKY
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WINNER

The MV4-HPJ – part of Sadowsky's Metro range, all hand-built in Japan – is an absolute belter. If you're looking for a trad bass that embraces the best elements of modernity, then your search could be at an end. This one has a two-piece alder body in a lovely dark cherry burst finish with a rosewood fingerboard (the other option is ash body with a maple board). The 21-fret neck is supremely comfortable. The chrome hardware is all Sadowsky's own, including a chunky High Mass bridge. The pickups are also made in-house and are partnered by the company's famous preamp which includes a boost-only two-band EQ and a Vintage Tone control, which is basically a treble roll-off for warmth and darkness.

In terms of sound, we're cruising in classy waters with bags of tonal power on tap. The bridge pickup is surprisingly fat and full, the neck pickup combines warmth with impact, and both pickups together gives a contemporary zingy clarity. Boosting the low-end super-sizes your tone; adding extra top comes close to slicing off the top of your head, and the VT control is on hand to induce a satisfying thuddy rumble. All in all, this high-quality, versatile P/J bass is huge fun.

Reviewed October 21/12
£1785

Contact: The Gallery 020 7267 5258
Web: www.thebassgallery.com

Contact: Yamaha Music UK 01908 366700
Web: www.yamaha-music.co.uk

YAMAHA BB2024X

The BB2024X, Yamaha's latest rendition of the venerable 33-year old Broad Bass model, is a top-notch rocker. It's hand-built in Japan, and the wood is treated by two processes - Acoustic Resonance Enhancement and Initial Resonance Acceleration - to improve the fundamental tone of the three-piece spline-jointed alder body. The neck is a sleek 34"-scale five-piece maple/mahogany affair with a rosewood fingerboard carrying cool oval position markers and 21 frets. Chrome hardware includes Yamaha's Vintage Plus bridge (with a diagonal string path through the body), The nut, unusually, is nickel silver. Passive electronics are linked to two specially-designed pickups - an alnico magnet split coil and a ceramic bar single coil.

The funky coat hides a high-quality rock bass that growls like something wild and caged. The neck pickup sound is raspy and edgy with a brooding midrange, and the bridge spits out a barking sound with highs that are snappy and aggressive. Okay, this Yamaha is an expensive instrument, but it's also a carefully thought-out, beautifully made bass that scores very highly as a solid all-round workhorse.

The Yamaha is expensive, but it's a carefully thought-out, beautifully made workhorse

Contact: Mansons Guitar Shop 01392 496379
Web: www.mansons.co.uk

MANSON JPJ SIGNATURE BASS

This replica of John Paul Jones' number one four-string bass shows just why Hugh Manson has been building instruments for him for many years. The JPJ has an offset body with spiky horns made up of mahogany wings topped by a two-piece quilted maple top with an aged cherry burst finish and an ultra-playable three-piece maple through-neck. Schaller provides the tuners, and there's a Hipshot D-tuner on the E-string. The bridge is a Badass, while EMG supplies both the pickups and the preamp.

What this Manson is all about is providing a close replica, current modifications and all, of the bass Jones currently uses with Them Crooked Vultures. The result is pure rock'n'roll. The tone varies between warm with a pleasing snarl to earthy and acoustic, and there's more than enough booty available to satisfy the most ardent of fundamentalists.

Needless to say, the craftsmanship is exemplary; this bass really is beautifully put together. Production from the Czech Republic is in limited numbers, but if you love JPJ and you've got the readies, then this is one queue that's well worth joining.

The JPJ is a replica of the bass John Paul Jones uses with Them Crooked Vultures. It's pure rock'n'roll

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Features include one 12AX7 preamp valve, one EL84 power valve and three speaker outputs (4, 8, and 16-ohm). This lets players mix and match its use with a variety of speaker cabinets, providing even more flexibility.

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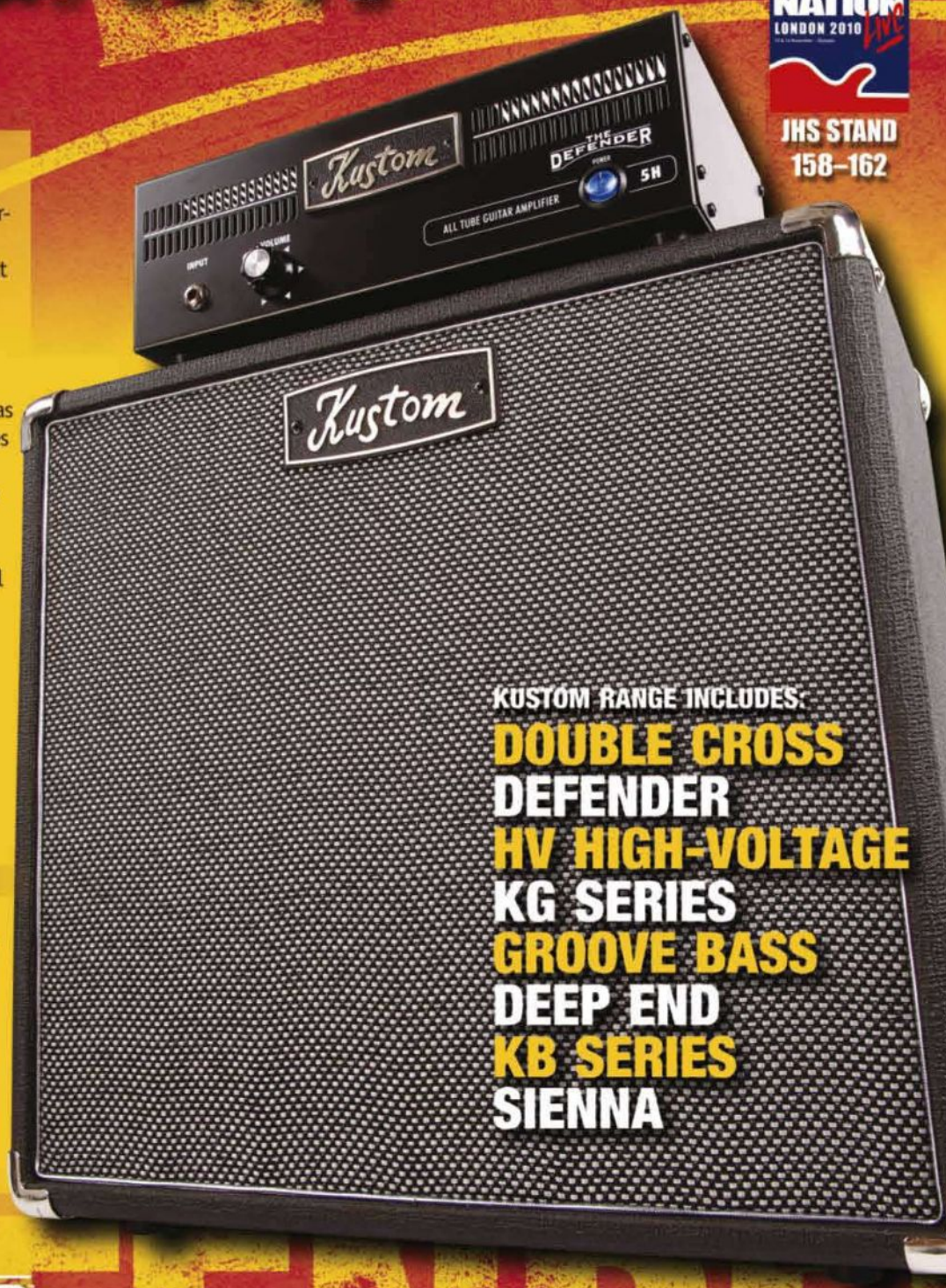

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WINNER Guitar Awards 2010 Best Bass Amp

AMPEG HERITAGE SVT-CL 300W HEAD

Reviewed: September 21/11
£2173

Whatever the issues about weight, the winner in our bass amp category couldn't really be anything other than Ampeg's mighty Heritage all-valve head. It's a throwback to the original SVT of the late '60s, but while the dimensions, the look and the back-breaking weight (36.3kg/80lbs) remain the same, the components have been upgraded to produce a more reliable version of the classic original. It's stuffed with 11 valves, including six massive 6550 tubes in the power amp section, all mounted on a steel chassis. The front panel has a three-band EQ with a five-position Midrange selector and Ampeg's old-school Ultra High and Ultra Low buttons. Other features include an XLR DI Out and a Slave Out, and you can properly bias the power amp with a simple flathead screwdriver.

Tonally, it's 'wow' all the way. The sound has real substance: fat, rich lows, a chunky, barking midrange and highs that are clean, rich and well-defined. Dialling in more bass joyously shakes the room and there's wonderful punch and impact available from the various mid frequencies, while adding treble illuminates your tone before morphing into a serious cutting edge. Forget the weight and forgive the price, because this is a world-class amp for serious professional use.

Contact: Loud Technology 01494 557398
Web: www.ampeg.com

Highly Recommended

Reviewed: November 22/1 £1890

The MoMark LMK with the 4x8" cab has a seismic bottom end and plenty of raspy snarl. It's an appealing package

Contact: Proel International 020 8761 9911
Web: www.markbass.it

MARKBASS MOMARK LMK

We've been fans of bumble-bee coloured Markbass gear for a long while, and this new MoMark LMK head and NY804 cab are of the usual high standard. The 500W-rated LMK is a ready-made version of Markbass' modular system where you can swap preamp, EQ and master sections to suit needs and styles, and the compact NY804 chucks out 800W via four eight-inch neodymium speakers. Amp controls are in two lines, as it's a twin channel affair; there are two Gains and two four-band EQs, plus the familiar Markbass VLE control for instant tonal warmth. You also get an FX loop and footswitch jack sockets.

Tonally, the rig sounds robust and pleasingly musical with a seismic bottom end and plenty of raspy snarl available, alongside clean, snappy note edges and bags of slicing cut. Introducing VLE is a recipe for retro heaven, and it's invaluable when you're in an excessively lively room. The modular aspect makes this an appealing package, as does the excellent power-to-weight ratio and a host of superb sounds. Another winner from Markbass.

Reviewed: April 21/6 £579

Think Ibanez can't do bass amps? Think again. This diminutive 250W 1x12" belter was the best combo we reviewed this year

Contact: Headstock Distribution 0121 508 6666
Web: www.ibanez.com

IBANEZ PROMETHEAN P5110

Think Ibanez can't do bass amps? Think again. This little belter was quite simply the best combo we reviewed this year. It's packaged in a diminutive plywood box weighing a paltry 12.5kg/27lbs that comes with tilt-back capability, and it shifts 250W of power through a single 12" speaker and a tweeter. As well as basic EQ and a Vibe control for vintage-style softening of the sound, there's a switchable six-band slider graphic and a handy global mute button. The amp head is detachable courtesy of four knurled bolts, while speaker out and headphone out jack sockets help make it a very versatile unit.

It's also much louder than you'd expect, and produces a full sound that's clean and clear with plenty of bottom end. The basic tone controls offer weight and bite and the graphic EQ deals with tonal details providing everything from subtle thickening to extra projection and weighty punch on tap. The combination of highly musical tone-shaping facilities, splendid portability and an extremely reasonable price make the compact Promethean a big hitter.

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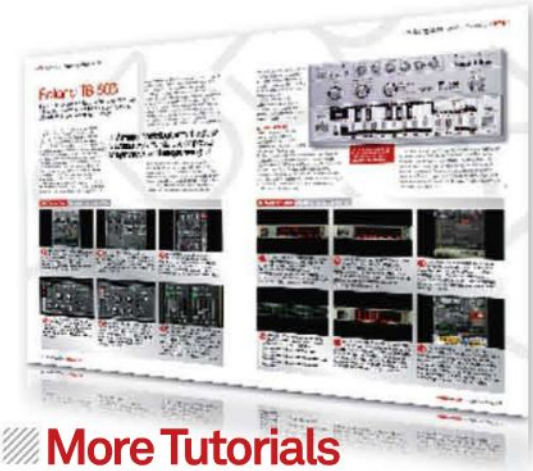

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Credit: Dezo Hoffmann / Rex Features

Staying Power

Tony Hicks, gifted guitarist and hook-provider for beloved Mancunian pop institution the Hollies for nigh on half a century, talks of songwriting and the value of musical mistakes to Alan Clayson

Though the Hollies are about to commence a lengthy theatre tour to tie in with the issue of a two-CD retrospective, *Midas Touch: The Very Best Of*, this most respected of British beat groups has always steered clear of the nostalgia circuit, working hard at sustaining interest in their latest output.

The Hollies always had a strong identity to set them apart from their peers. The most distinctive element may have been their trademark harmony vocal sound, established in the early 1960s by Tony Hicks, Allan Clarke and Graham Nash - but it's impossible to ignore the empathy between Hicks' dazzling guitar technique and Bobby Elliott's drumming, nurtured ever since 1961, when the pair played together in Ricky Shaw and the Dolphins in Nelson, Lancashire, the town where Tony Hicks was born in 1945.

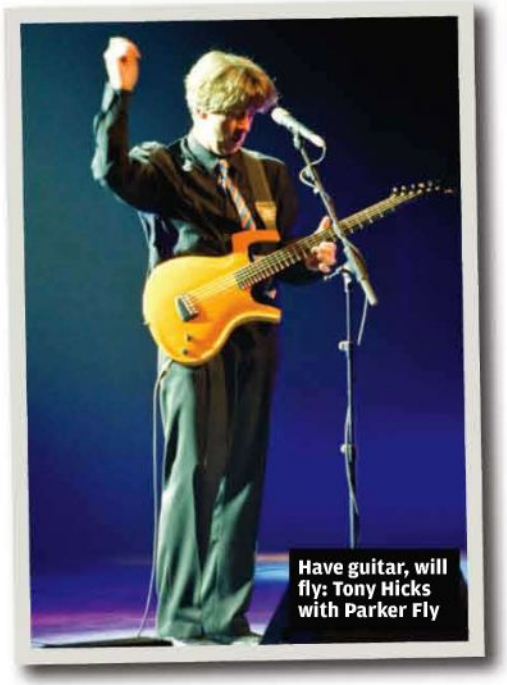
Nobody in Hicks' family played music, but his walk with destiny began at the age of 12 when he joined a superfluity of acoustic guitarists in the Skifflettes, who managed a quantum leap from messing about to seizing the prize of a spot on Carroll Levis's *Discoveries* ITV series, the *Britain's Got Talent* of its day. This, however, was the ceiling of the outfit's impact. Tony, soon to be an apprenticeship electrician, screwed a pickup onto his guitar, a German-made Voss. Next he acquired a Selmer Truvoice amp and a semi-solid Hofner Club 40, and then a Futurama solidbody. Soon, hints of an idiosyncratic style emerged through hard listening to the likes of Scotty Moore, James Burton, Buddy Holly and our own Joe Moretti from Johnny Kidd and the Pirates. 'Much later, Allan Clarke complimented me by saying my playing was "personal",' Hicks proudly recollects, 'meaning it was unique to me.'

Throwing in his lot with Ricky Shaw and the Dolphins, he purchased an Aussie-made Maton MS-500 Mastersound. An unusual choice, the Maton is rumoured to have later passed into the hands of Roy Barber - of Sheffield's Dave Berry and the Cruisers - and George Harrison. 'I've had lots enquiries from collectors over the years owing to a rare photograph of George playing one,' he says. 'It might well be the same guitar, and it probably went back to the music shop in Manchester where I bought it.'

The Hollies, mid-'60s: Bobby Elliott, Bernie Calvert, Tony Hicks (with Vox Phantom VI), Graham Nash and Allan Clarke

Credit: Chris Walter/Getty

Credit: Rob Haywood



Have guitar, will fly: Tony Hicks with Parker Fly

'I didn't jump at the chance. I'd never heard of the Hollies. But then I heard them coming through the club's air-vent'

SOS Catalogue

THE HOLLIES
STAY WITH THE HOLLIES (1964)

The Hollies had no consistent source of original material on this debut, but lent individuality to a treasury of Merseybeat standards

THE HOLLIES
FOR CERTAIN BECAUSE (1966)

This first all self-written LP is epitomised by non-rhyming couplets in *Peculiar Situation* and the marching feet underpinning *Crusader*

THE HOLLIES
THEN, NOW ALWAYS (2009)

One Touch features the return of Tony's electric sitar, and there's much use of Abbey Road's Stylus RMX 'groove module' instrument plug-in

Gear

Guitars: Paul Reed Smith, Parker Fly, Danelectro electric sitar and Danelectro 12-string, Roger Giffin electric 12-string, Fender electric mandolin, Gibson Les Paul Junior, Nechville electric banjo. Acoustics: Martin D-35 and Lowden

Amp: Marshall JMP-1

Effects: TC Electronic G Force guitar processor

Credit: Rob Haywood

Ricky Shaw and his Dolphins were as popular in Manchester as the Beatles were in nearby Liverpool, and were often hired to accompany visiting chart acts. One of them was Doug Sheldon, who persuaded the Dolphins to drive to London for a session in Decca's West Hampstead studios. Though paid little beyond petrol money, they were permitted to record their own version of *Trambone*, a Chet Atkins tune. 'It was fun,' smiles Hicks. 'I was happy to be semi-pro. Perhaps if I hadn't received a call from Allan Clarke and Graham Nash late in 1962, I'd have been content to remain an electrician in the local mill.

'I didn't exactly jump at the chance as I'd never heard of the Hollies, but I caught a bus to Manchester to hear them at the Twisted Wheel. Along the same street was another basement club which was packed out. I asked the manageress why, and was told that the Beatles, whose first record was out, were playing inside. She mentioned that the Hollies went down well there, too. Further down the road, I heard them through the Twisted Wheel's air-vent. I walked down the stairs, spoke to Graham and eventually ended up replacing their lead guitarist.'

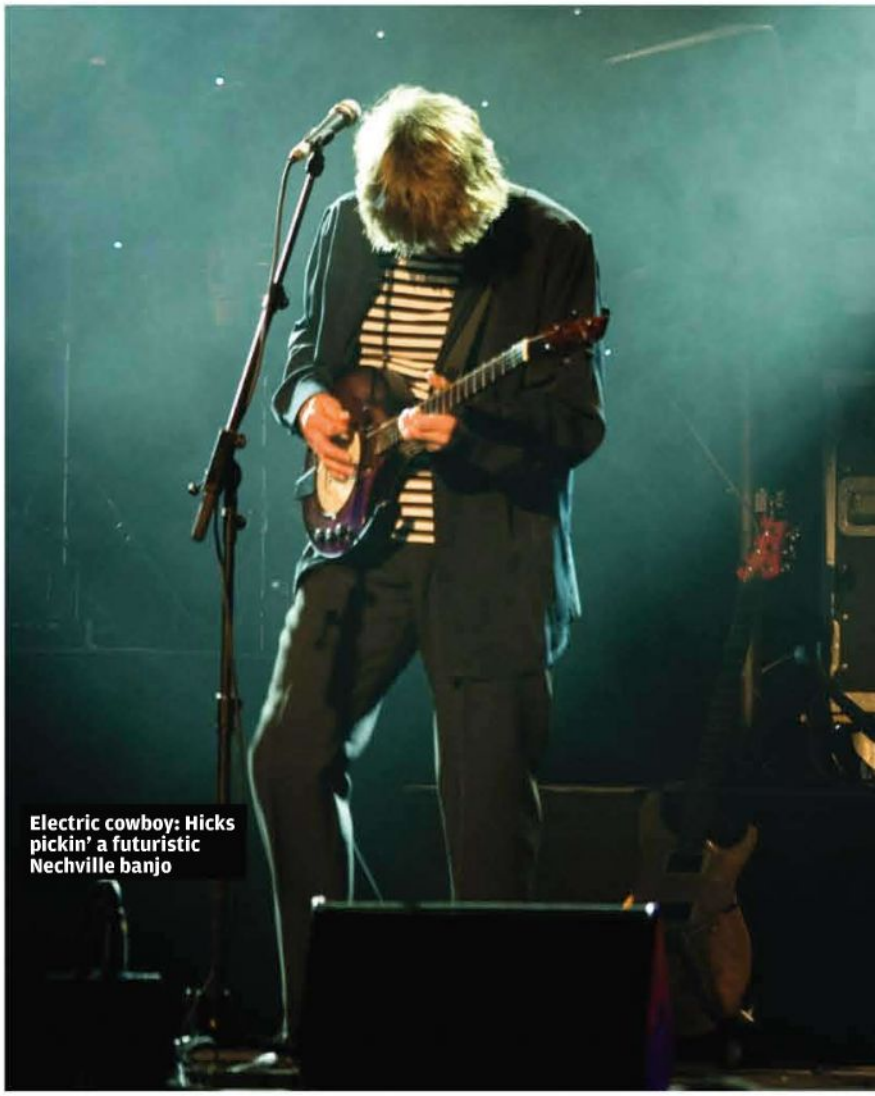
Within weeks, the Hollies lifted off the runway when EMI producer Ron Richards caught them at Liverpool's Cavern (with Nash hacking away on a stringless acoustic to conform to the two guitars-bass-drums beat group archetype). Hicks was the only guitarist discernible on the Hollies' first releases after the first 45 *Ain't That Just Like Me* crept into the Top 30. 'That confirmed that I wasn't to continue at the mill,' he grins. 'I remember I didn't like what I was doing on that song, so I stopped playing. Ron told me not to do that in future because although I might have hit the wrong notes, it was the overall momentum of the track that counted - which might vanish with a re-take.

'I ended up singing almost by accident. I must have been mumbling too close to a mic, and was roped in to supply baritone. The harmonies were put together by feel. We used to record vocals round one unidirectional mic, staring at each other's mouths, watching the phrasing as it actually happened.'

Hicks also began writing, collaborating with new recruit Bobby Elliott on *Keep Off That Friend Of Mine*, B-side of 1964's *Just One Look*. Package tour travel round Britain made serious songwriting tricky, but flashes of inspiration could be revised and developed in hotel rooms by Allan, Graham and Tony. Soon they surfaced as the Hollies' caste-within-a-caste, responsible for most of the more memorable A-sides.

'By and large, I came up with choruses,' explains Hicks. 'Graham had a knack for verses, just as Allan did for middle eights, but nothing was cut and dried. We tended to work on the run, using a little Telefunken tape-recorder. Most of the *For Certain Because* LP was written in the back of a car in Sweden. On one of our trips to North America I purchased an autoharp, and wrote *Pay You Back With Interest* on it, which might not have happened if I'd been tinkering on a guitar. Others that were mine included *Pegasus* - my first lead vocal - and *Peculiar Situation*, which came about when I met a lady who brought her children along to a show at Guildford Civic Hall. She became a great friend.'

Having proved a sound investment for EMI, the Hollies were allowed unlimited time at Abbey Road and the freedom to experiment with whatever weird implements were lying around Studio Two. Nevertheless, the singles tended not to stray far from orthodox instrumentation: Hicks played 12-string on *I Can't Let Go* and *Look Through Any Window*, banjo on *Stop! Stop! Stop!* and electric sitar on 1972's *The Baby*.



Electric cowboy: Hicks pickin' a futuristic Nechville banjo

The Trouble With Singers

When Hollies vocalist Allan Clarke jumped ship in 1971, the band didn't have too far to look. They'd been supported by a Scandinavian act called Bamboo, and they were impressed enough with lead singer Mikael Rickfors to pinch him. Hicks had reservations: 'I never felt that *Romany*, the album we did with Mikael, was the Hollies,' he decides. 'It might have done better if it had been attributed to an unknown entity. Yet one of the best things we ever did is *The Baby*, the spin-off single.

'However, that album was the beginning of the end as far as Mikael's tenure was concerned. He had a terrific voice, but his English wasn't spot-on. When recording with him, the slightest wrong inflection lyrically meant starting again, and risking losing the energy. Also, though he looked great, he never really wanted to be in the main spotlight.

'I suggested sounding out Allan about re-enlisting. So I went for a drink with him, and that was more or less that. It helped, I guess, that his song *Long Cool Woman In A Black Dress* had just sold a million in the States. It began as an album track and Ron didn't see it as a single, but Don Ellis, head of A&R in New York, reckoned it stood a chance. His judgement proved correct, and it was one of the biggest sellers we ever had over there.'

The Hollies today, with original members Bobby Elliott and Tony Hicks third and fifth from left

Effects only became conspicuous later, with wah-wah on a crack at disco, *Wiggle That Wotsit*, and fuzz on 1987's *This Is It*.

Exactly 20 years before, internal discord had led to Nash's departure. Clarke too left for a while, but the hits kept on coming up to 1974's *The Air That I Breathe*, even if, since the late '60s, Top 10 strikes could no longer be taken for granted. The *Holliedaze* medley of old smashes warranted a Top Of The Pops appearance in 1981 after a close shave the previous summer with the blood-and-thunder *Soldier's Song* - and, courtesy of a snippet in a TV commercial, that *He Ain't Heavy* windfall was on the not-too-distant horizon. This song was B-sided with a tune by mid-'70s hitmaker John Miles, a pal of Tony, who deputised for lead vocalist Clarke for three concerts in 1999. 'Allan had pulled out because his wife was ill, and John agreed to step in with no rehearsal. Although he had to have the words in front of him, he sang that night's two-hour set perfectly.'

'The producer told me that although I might hit wrong notes, it was the overall momentum of the track that counted'

Miles was unable to join permanently when Clarke retired that autumn, but Carl Wayne, once of the Move, was an inspired choice. 'He didn't stick to the script, but I didn't mind as he was a brilliant showman - and although he was reluctant, we added a few Move songs.'

Following Carl's death in 2004, the group approached Peter Howarth, acclaimed for playing Roy Orbison in the West End musical *Only The Lonely*. 'It wasn't just his musical ability but his dressing room attitude,' explains Hicks. 'You're always pleased to see him. I know of bands that stay in separate hotels!'

With Peter at the central microphone flanked by both the other relative newcomers and mainstays Elliott and Hicks, those foot-stomping ovations for the latter-day Hollies are not merely for the older songs. They are as likely to occur for highlights of recent albums such as *Staying Power* and *Then, Now, Always (Dolphin Days)* during what are, in their way, as much celebrations of the distinguished career of Tony Hicks as of the Hollies, the group with whom his name will always be synonymous.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Hicks, Clarke and Nash wrote under the name L Ransford in the '60s
- The Hollies backed the Everlys on Two Yanks In England, an LP from 1966
- Hicks started out with a heavy pick; these days he uses a super-thin one
- Tony sang on the title track of Then, Now Always by brother-in-law Bobby Elliott

Wylde Domination

Parting company with Ozzy, Black Label Society, blood clots, cold turkey, coffin-shaped axes and beef jerky... Rik Flynn discovers why there's never a dull moment in the world of Zakk Wylde

'Strength, determination, merciless, forever.' So reads the motto of Zakk Wylde's Black Label Society, and far from being just a spurious gimmick to enhance the group's image and shift some units, it's a motto that seems to genuinely sum up the man and his band. You only have to look at recent events in Wylde's life to know that he's made of pretty stern stuff.

Aside from losing his father last year, he was also recently diagnosed with a rare blood condition that very nearly killed him (blood clots passed through his heart three times). As a result, he's had to quit drinking. As if that wasn't enough, he recently discovered he was being sidelined by Ozzy via an interview in a magazine. Apparently Ozzy felt that his band and Black Label Society were sounding too similar and that Wylde's drinking was getting out of control.

Many would falter, but Wylde brushes it off without so much as a flinch. 'I feel lucky to have played with him at all!' he says. 'It was such a great experience... 23 years! I've got Black Label, so I'm cool. Gus G is a great guitarist and I hope he has a good time, man.'

An admirable attitude, but does he agree the two bands were getting too close for comfort? 'With Ozzy it's always gonna change because the guitar player is always changing,' Wylde muses. 'Randy wrote Randy's stuff, Jake [Lee] wrote his stuff. When I came in I was writing the riffs. Now Gus is there, he's gonna start writing the riffs. It's a different guitar player! A different guy writing the shit!'

So there's no animosity towards the boss, but surely the health issues, kicking the booze... it must have had an effect? 'I don't dwell on it, man,' states Wylde. 'Some guys make such a big deal of quitting drinking. If the doctor says you gotta stop drinking, then you stop.'

Zakk Wylde, philosophical about the Ozzy brush-off: 'Twenty-three years. It was a great experience'

'Some guys make a big deal out of quitting drinking. If the doctor says you gotta stop drinking, then you stop'

Wylde has certainly spread his wings wide, and his new album *Order Of The Black* lets loose everything from ear-splitting thrash metal and light-speed shredding to complex nylon-stringed Spanish fingerplay and mournful laments. He writes, he sings, he owns his licks... this is his best offering yet.

However, it's the moments when Wylde shelves his metal roots, as in the piano ballad *Darkest Days*, that his songwriting really shines through - and along with it his love of a more unexpected influence, Elton John. 'Elton was the first thing I saw as a kid,' Wylde remembers. 'It was on the Sonny and Cher show doing *Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds*. I was getting chills. I still love Elton, man, he's still killing it; touring all the time, still making records - the whole nine yards.'

The original idea for the song came to him via another great British musical institution. 'I was listening to the Stones,' remembers Wylde. 'I was just jamming out that chord progression - G, C to A minor - to sound like a Stonesy thing, then it turned into that song.' So is that how the rest of the album was written? 'I just sit down and start writing a riff,' Wylde explains. 'I pretty much wrote everything in the studio. The only things I had was the piano stuff, but I didn't have the melodies.'

Wylde's inspiration comes in all forms. 'When you've got the History Channel and the Bible, that's all you need, bro!' he laughs. '*Godspeed Hell Bound* was written in front of a documentary about World War II.' He's not afraid to mix it up, either, and his penchant for other disciplines doesn't get lost. *Chupacapra* has

Catalogue

BLACK LABEL SOCIETY HANGOVER MUSIC VOL VI (2004)

A much calmer offering from Black Label Society, this album contains a cover of Procul Harum's *A Whiter Shade Of Pale* and lives up to its title nicely

BLACK LABEL SOCIETY MAFIA (2005)

A number one album in the US independent charts, *Mafia* has BLS firing on all cylinders with pinched harmonics and divebombs galore

BLACK LABEL SOCIETY ORDER OF THE BLACK (2010)

Wylde shows off his ample armoury of guitar skills from flamenco to squealing metal. BLS at their best - a scorching selection

Gear

Gibson Les Paul Custom Bullseye, Flying V, BFG, ZV, Epiphone Graveyard Disciple
Amps: Marshall JCM 800 2203ZW
Jim Dunlop Signature Wah

Wylde strumming out a vibey flamenco instrumental. 'I listen to a whole bunch of flamenco,' he enthuses. 'Al Di Meola, John McLaughlin, Paco de Lucia... they're amazing. I listen to stuff that has nothing to do with metal. If you're eating cheeseburgers all day, the last thing you wanna do is eat cheeseburgers..."

However, as you'd expect, the new album still rocks hard. The first thing fans got their hands on was the full-tilt metal statement *Parade Of The Dead*, a homage to the Grateful Dead, a band who have become a kind of map for Wylde's path with his own band. 'They started a whole movement,' he states. 'It's a great thing, 'cos Deadheads [hardcore Grateful Dead fans] all bond together - everyone has something in common.' The Beserkers, aka the Doom Crew, BLS's army of fans, are more than just a faceless record-buying audience keeping them in studded leather wristbands; they're a family split into 'chapters'. 'It's worldwide,' says Wylde. 'It's like you live in London, but you've got friends coming over from Birmingham, Scotland, another guy from Ireland... it's an awesome thing. Right now we're planning these Black Label Doom Crew pubs. We're gonna have live entertainment - maybe bands I signed for Panworkz Records, our own label.'

He also plans to record his signings in his newly-built studio, the Black Label Bunker. *Order Of The Black* was a chance to put it through its paces. 'This album was a test-run,' Wylde explains. 'I remember talking to Oz about having a studio. I was, like, "Can you imagine how much money you must have spent on recording since you made the first Sabbath album?" It took us 94 days to record this album, so that would have been $94,000 for starters - and that's without mixing and mastering!'

'With Black Label there's no rest. No Saturdays, no Sundays, it's eight days a week'

There's the label, the Bunker, the pubs... but it doesn't stop there. 'We're working on the *Black Label Guitar Bible*. We're doing our own beer, coffee, beef jerky, we've got a hot sauce - all types of shit under the Black Label tree. I'm working on a script right now for a movie. It's a comedy thing and I'm gonna be directing. It's like Mel Brooks and Monty Python on steroids!'

Zakk Wylde's won numerous awards, played with his childhood hero, formed a band that's massive in their own right and all the rest. He's clearly hellbent on taking on the world, and with 'Strength, determination, merciless, forever' as his battlecry, we won't be standing in his way. Take it from the man himself: 'With Black Label there is no rest,' laughs Wylde. 'No Saturdays, no Sundays - it's eight days a week, 25 hours a day, 366 days a year.'

Wylde Axeman

Ever since Wylde's first guitar, he's been a Gibson junkie in imitation of his heroes, Randy Rhoads and Jimmy Page. 'My first really good guitar was a pelham blue SG,' says Wylde. 'Randy played a Gibson, Jimmy played one. I love all guitars, but the Les Paul Custom... I love it!'

As you'd expect from a guitarist of Wylde's caliber, he has signature guitars coming out of his ears: the Bullseye, Flying V, BFG, the new coffin-shaped Epiphone Graveyard Disciple. He's even designed one himself; the ZV - the offspring of an SG and a Flying V but with his favoured Les Paul neck.

'I like the shaved back of the neck and the 6000 fretwire and the EMGs in there,' says Wylde. 'The SGV was my design - I've been jamming it out a lot recently. They did a great job with my Disciple, too. When I started if you bought a guitar for $800 it would be a piece of garbage! ' It was on a Gibson that Wylde fashioned his characteristic pinch harmonics, and he's now planning to share his techniques with a tuition book, *The Zakk Wylde Black Label Guitar Bible*.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Ozzy Osbourne is the godfather to all of Wylde's children
- Wylde first heard Ozzy needed a guitarist on Howard Stern's radio show
- Zakk has built a shrine to his guitar hero, the late Randy Rhoads, in his house
- Wylde has nicknamed his original Les Paul Bullseye 'The Grail'

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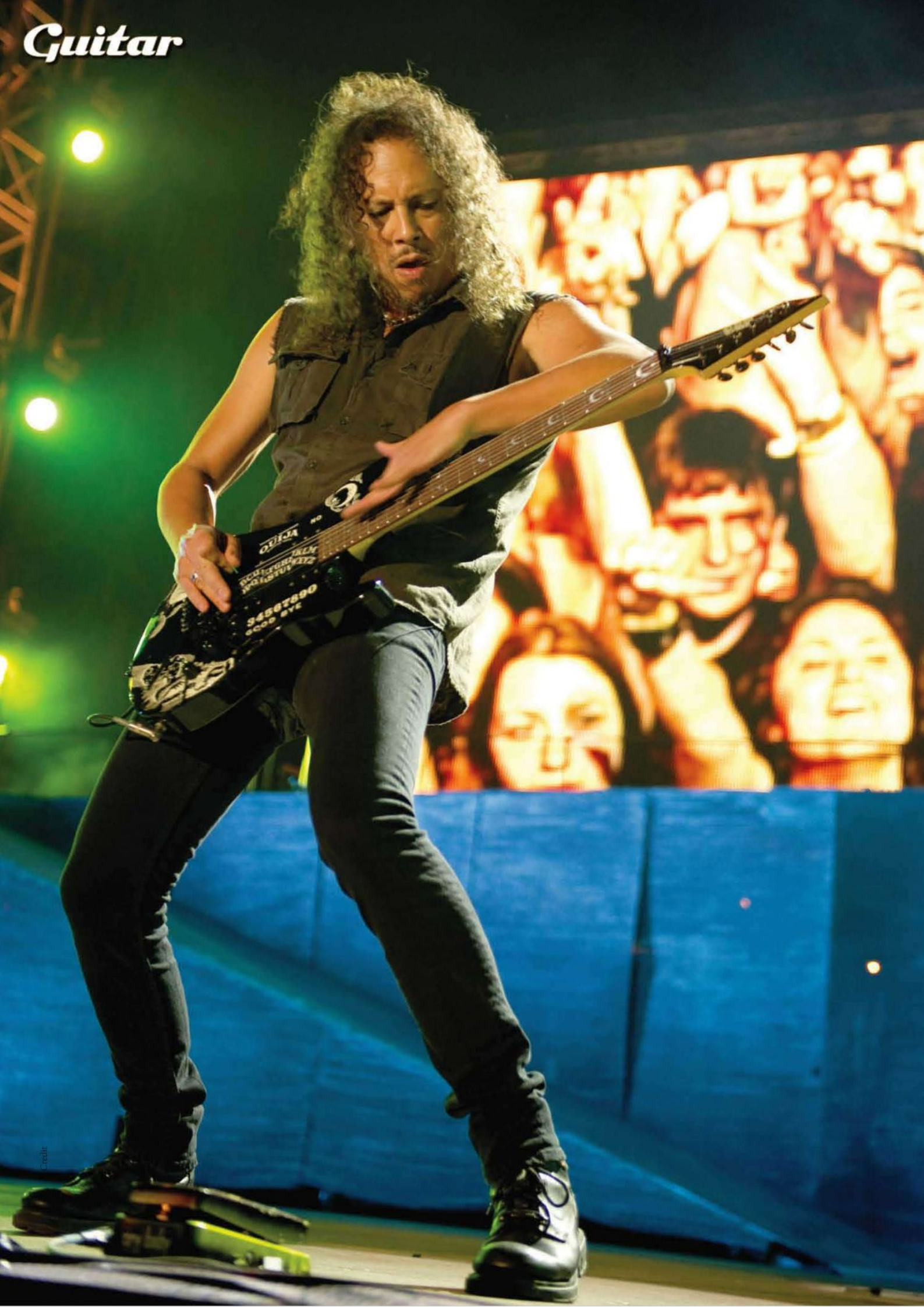

Credit

Metallic Methods

After Death Magnetic and the Big Four tour, Metallica's lead guitarist Kirk Hammett deserves a bit of time to do what he loves best – kick back and work on his guitar playing. Interview by Joe Matera

What would constantly being voted one of the most influential guitarists of all time do to your ego? For Metallica's Kirk Hammett, resting on his hard-rocking laurels or lounging about feeling confident isn't something he'd ever dream of subscribing to. Nope: instead, he's involved in a constant day-by-day struggle to keep on improving his playing.

'Lately I've been trying to concentrate on the parts of my style that needs work,' he says. 'It's just little subtle things that I never really paid attention to before, but they're things that I really feel I need to work on.' One approach Hammett uses to enforce such progress is adhering to a rigorous daily routine. 'I do exercises... especially a lot of chromatic exercises,' he says. 'I also do chord-type exercises, as well as run through scales. I even have a bunch of my own exercises that I made up, and I use them a lot too.'

Hammett is a studied guitarist; he's taken the craft of guitar very seriously ever since he first picked it up at the age of 15. Shortly afterwards he began taking lessons from a then-unknown teacher, Joe Satriani, who instilled in his young protégé crucial qualities which has held him in good stead ever since.

'Joe taught me the importance of using exercises - and not only that, but also the importance of coming up with your own exercises that correlates with your own technique,' Hammett emphasises. 'So I now have my own that I use to help build upon whatever weaknesses I have in my playing. Joe also taught me all about modes and putting chords together, what scales worked over what progressions, about three-octave scales, three-octave modes, chord placement and arpeggios.

'At times I would bring in a rock solo that I wanted to learn and he would show it to me. He would listen to it about twice and then he'd show me how it was done.

'Mind you, this was 1982, and the one thing I have to say about Joe is that he has always sounded like that! I mean, he's obviously better now, but his initial style and attitude was all there when I first met him. I was scratching my head thinking, "Why isn't this guy *huge*?"'

From Satriani he also inherited a profound love for melody, an element which permeates much of his recorded work with Metallica, especially in his soloing excursions. For Hammett, his approach to constructing such solos is remarkably simple.

'Ideally a solo should be like a good meal,' he says. 'It needs to start off with a bang, then it needs a good meaty middle section and then a sweet finish. For me, when it comes to the solo part, the first couple of licks really need to set the tone of the solo. It should really just jump out and grab you. What I've always tried to do is to come up with catchy things... hooky, melodic parts that will grab the listener.'

While Metallica has continued to evolve musically during the course of its existence, Hammett too has looked for ways to expand upon his sonic palette.

Credit: Anton Corbijn

Hammett, Hetfield, Ulrich, Trujillo: this band still gives good grimace

'A solo should be like a good meal. It should start with a bang, have a meaty middle section and then a sweet finish'

Catalogue

METALLICA
...AND JUSTICE FOR ALL (1988)

Progressive and complex, each track an exercise in musical endurance - this solidified Hammett and Hetfield's reputation as metal's newest guitar heroes

METALLICA
METALLICA (1991)

With a more streamlined approach, the group achieved a commercial and creative peak. Kirk shines on the sonic blast of *Enter Sandman*

METALLICA
DEATH MAGNETIC (2008)

Metallica reinvigorated, with new energy and maturity and firing on all cylinders in a more refined classic setting courtesy of producer Rick Rubin

Gear

Stage guitars: many ESPs including three signatures (KH2 Vintage, Ltd KH-502 and KH-503), a KH-1, three KH-2s, a KH-3, a KH-4 and several others. Gibson Les Paul Standard, LP Custom and three Flying Vs; Fender Strat; two Fernandes;, Danelectro; Godin; Jackson; Ibanez; Tom Anderson
Effects: Dunlop Crybaby guts (some in Ernie Ball bodies), Roland VG-8, Tube Screamer, Lovetone Meatball
Amps: Mostly Mesa/Boogie live, but also Marshall, Matchless, Fender and Vox for recording

Kirk On His Signature ESP

Pictured right is the new ESP KH2 Vintage, complete with 'caution hot' sticker. 'It's pretty basic. There are some elaborate shapes out there, but I'm a traditionalist at heart,' opines Hammett. 'The neck-through-body is really important for sustain. The EMG pickups are a big part of the whole thing, too, and instead of having two volumes and two tone I prefer two volumes and just one tone. The Floyd Rose is also an integral element. I'm not so great at using the whammy bar, but having it there just in case is great. For me, the criteria when it comes to guitars is that it has to look good, sound good and play good. That was my whole intention with ESP. I told them if they could just make guitars that nail those three things, I'd be happy.'

Hammett with Les Paul onstage at Sonisphere in Turkey, June 2010

In recent times he's focused his attention on his picking technique - and this has caused him to instigate a major shift in the type of pick he uses.

'I'm now using a small jazz pick,' he reveals. 'It's made such a big difference. In fact, it's totally changed my playing. It's probably the biggest alteration I've made to my technique.

'I also realised that over the last couple of years or so, playing strings with an .011" top E has been really hard on my hands. It started to cause tendon problems. I had trigger finger on my left-hand ring finger, which isn't a good condition for a guitar player to have! It screwed me up for six months. I had to sleep with a splint and put all kinds of lotions on it. We had a 10-week break from touring and I pretty much didn't play for the whole period so my hand could heal. Now I'm back to .010"s.'

The adjustment in string gauge has also caused a difference in Hammett's tone. 'It doesn't really sound the same,' he says. 'I don't think it's as good as it was when I was playing with .011"s, but you can compensate with some EQ and get pretty close to the same kind of sound. Strangely enough, I didn't know that was even possible.

'But now that I'm back to playing .010"s, my hands really love it. I can play longer, my muscle stamina is better, and at the end of the show it doesn't feel like my finger or my hand is going to fall apart. That was a major revelation.'

Having been on the road for the past two years in support of the group's most recent studio effort, 2008's *Death Magnetic*, Metallica will be finally winding down their lengthy world tour at the end of this year. For Hammett, coming home and enjoying some time off is something he's looking forward to... but the break will only be a brief respite, as the group plan to begin pre-production for their next album soon.

'We have riffs here and there, but at the moment there are no complete songs as yet,' he reveals. 'But we do all have tons of music just lying around. That's the great thing about Metallica... there's never any shortage of ideas.'

'Playing .011 strings has been really hard on my hands. I had trigger finger, which screwed me up for six months'

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DID YOU KNOW?

Hammett collects horror movies. One of his favourite actors is Boris Karloff

Steak? No thanks. He's a lacto-ovo vegetarian

The first concert he ever attended was Day On The Green with the Eagles, Steve Miller, Heart and Foreigner

He has studied Eastern philosophy, Buddhism and Shintoism

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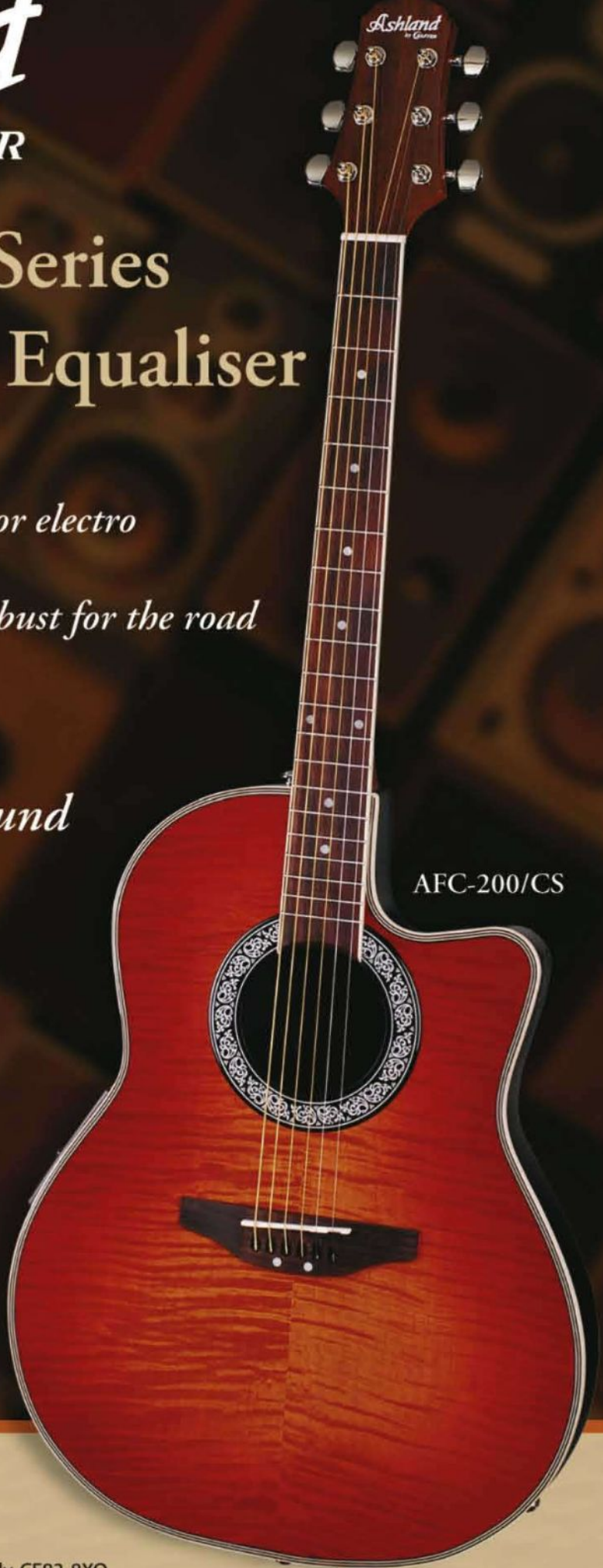

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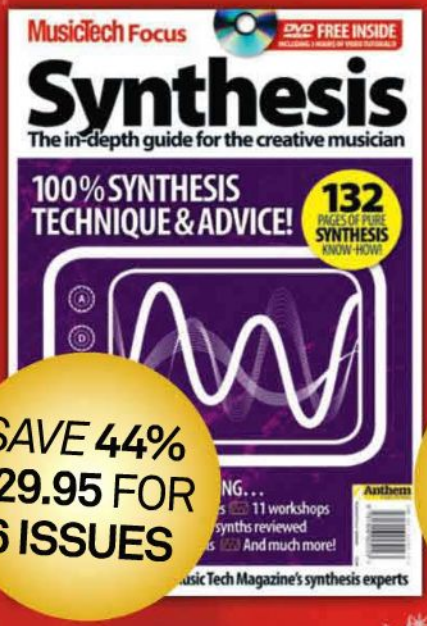

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Allied Forces

Ben Turner, ex-Dakota singer/guitarist and now with a new outfit, Broken Souls Alliance, needs guitars that do the business live, sound great in the studio and inspire new tunes as well. Lars Mullen finds out how he does it

New three-piece band Broken Souls Alliance make big, atmospheric, emotional music influenced by classic US post-rock names like Nirvana, Smashing Pumpkins and Foo Fighters. They're putting their first album together right now, and are trying to select a dozen tracks from the 20 or so recorded at studios in France and Italy.

Ben Talbot is the guitarist and songwriter, and as well as cannily assembling a collection of instruments that'll do the job in almost any situation, he works hard on keeping the creativity flowing. 'I'm very passionate about writing and recording, and I love travelling – it really helps me with inspiration,' he says. 'The album I wrote for my last band, Dakota, was all about a break-up, a subject that's fuelled a lot of people! If I'm stuck in one location for too long I go stale, so a change of surroundings stimulates the imagination.'

It's spooky how many subjects of *Private Collection* kicked off at an early age. Ben was lucky enough to have a music teacher for a grandmother, and began learning piano at the age of just three. By the time he started school he knew his way around a keyboard, and the 'good old first guitar', as he puts it, arrived when he was seven. By the time another couple of years had passed, he was writing his first songs. He also joined a choir and had vocal coaching, which can't be bad preparation for being the singer in a band.

'The roadie dropped the black Telecaster on its headstock with a hell of a crash. I just went ahead and it was still perfectly in tune'

'When I'm writing, a notebook and pen and a decent acoustic guitar bought for all the right reasons never really leave my side,' Ben says. 'I have a passion for Gibson acoustics, and I'm lucky enough to have a few.

'Although it's a little big for travelling around with, my black Gibson J-30 is the perfect writing companion. I found this one in the back of Around About Sound in Cheltenham. The dreadnought body delivers a really huge sound but it's not too boomy, so it's ideal for big, strummy chords.

This J-45 reissue comes with '60s details like a cherry finish, an adjustable bridge and a white scratchplate

Left, a black Gibson J-30 dreadnought with Rare Earth pickup; right, a Larrivee P-05 parlour

2009 Telecaster with bound edges and a gold guard

'All my guitars, acoustic or electric, were purchased for the way they sound when recording in the studio, so cosmetics really come a close second.... but when I saw this gorgeous J-45 Custom Shop vintage reissue in Guitar Village in Farnham, finished in see-through red with a contrasting white scratchplate, I just kept everything crossed hoping that it would hold up to its reputation. I wasn't disappointed - the volume and tone are wonderful. Again, the low end is really powerful but it doesn't dominate the sound, and the highs chime away for perfect balance. This guitar also records really well mic'd up or straight to the desk. I used it for one of the new songs on the album called *Sleep Tomorrow*.

'This gorgeous Larrivee P-05 parlour model also has a remarkably big sound. Fingerpicking comes easy on this one, thanks to the wide fingerboard. It really oozes quality. It's made of all-solid woods including Canadian sitka spruce for the soundboard, mahogany back and sides and an African ebony fingerboard. The harmonics sing out just effortlessly. This is a very inspirational guitar for writing and playing live. It's also become a dressing room guitar, used to warm up the vocals back stage.'

Ben needs a variety of guitars for live and studio work, and he couldn't do without the original solidbody workhorse. 'This black 2009 Tele is a great all-rounder... and it's as tough as nails,' he recommends. 'When Dakota was up and running, we played at a NFL American football game at Wembley in front of a massive crowd and during a guitar swap between songs, the roadie dropped it on the headstock with a hell of a crash. I just went ahead and it

'There's just something about an old Fender. The Mustang sounds really bright and crystal-clear'

was still perfectly in tune and nothing was out of alignment! I'd at least expected the intonation to be miles adrift. It has all the Tele twang, and I prefer the warmth of a rosewood fingerboard as opposed to the harder edge of a maple board. I just crank up the treble on the amp if I need it to cut through a little more.

'I picked up this natural-finish Thinline Tele from Wunjo Guitars in London's Denmark Street. With a semi-hollow ash body and a maple neck and fingerboard you'd think it would cut you in half, but with these thicker, punchier humbuckers it's an ideal combination. I used this one all through the new album for big overdriven chords and soaring leads. One song, *Empty Word To Say*, has this guitar tuned to open G with the first and sixth strings removed. It just sounds so pure.

'I have another Thinline, a USA-built black one, which I also bought from Guitar Village in Farnham. I do like something a little different, and this one was really reasonable at £599. The guys in the shop said they'd named it a Tele Frankenstein as it was made up from other parts. The body is original, but the pickups have been replaced and the neck is from a Tele Custom. Although it played like a bag of crisps in the shop I knew it had potential, so I let Bob Yiend from Aroundabout Sound have free reign to get it up and running. I rate Bob as one of the best guitar techs in the UK. It now plays like a dream, and if I ever want a big trashy sound, this is the one.

'While some of the newer Fenders sound amazing, there's just something about an older one. My candy apple red Mustang has a sound that I can't quite describe... a bit like a drop

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Ivory-finish Gibson SG Special with P90s

Two Les Pauls: a black 1991 and a cherry sunburst model kept for studio use

'I love the look of a semi-acoustic. The red 335 has got the ideal sound for this band, both rhythm and lead'

of water, maybe. It's really bright, crystal-clear and right up front. I love this guitar. I had one in Lake Placid blue before; it played okay but in comparison it sounded really dull. This one is beautiful and it's a staple of my collection.

'I was in Truro, way down in Cornwall, and saw this amazing-looking metallic silver Fender Strat with a matching headstock in the window of Modern Music, but the shop was closed and I was on my way home. They were really good about it and we did the deal in a motorway service station near Bristol. Our guitarist Rob Armitage uses it to harmonise lead parts. It has the ability to mix the bridge and middle pickup via a push/pull volume knob. I'm a total tone-head, though, and I just feel that if I'm recording and I want a humbucker or a single coil, I'd rather use a guitar with the appropriate pickup than mess about. I mean, if you were going to South America, you wouldn't buy a guidebook about Germany...

'I don't play this Strat enough, but I'm knocked out each time I do. I love the clarity of it, and it's an example of how good some modern Fenders sound. We often use a single coil guitar like a Tele or a Strat to add a sprinkling of high-end sonics to a track... that little extra sparkle.

'In the studio I like to keep the guitars as pure as possible, although we do use Guitar Rig and

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'The guy in Angel Music said he was selling me the heaviest Precision in the world. I laughed, but if you play it for an hour without sitting down your back is going to ache'

Amplitude, but mixed with a live signal from a mic'd up cab normally from a Tone King amp. It keeps the signal warmer and a lot more organic.'

We begin our examination of Ben's Gibsons with a black '91 Les Paul. 'What can you say about these that hasn't been said?' he grins. 'This one and this cherry sunburst one are all over the album. We used them overdriven for laying down the mantle as a structure for the rest of the song. The sunburst one is only a few years old. We use it as a studio guitar so it doesn't really get gigged.'

Not all Ben's guitars make him ecstatic. 'Well, I certainly don't hate any of them, but I'm not all that fond of this Gibson SG,' he admits. 'I needed a thicker single-coil sound for a track I'd written for the old band, so when a friend offered me this one with a pair of P90s for silly money, I took him up on it. As a sound for the studio, it did the job really well. Because of the way it looks it's not really a favourite of mine, but that's just me. Good job we don't all like the same guitar!'

Ben's mood changes as we move on to a pair of slimline semi-solids. 'I said it was the sound of a guitar that does it for me first, but I love the look of a semi-acoustic,' he acknowledges. 'The white one with the gold hardware is a Gibson 320 which has been customised with humbuckers. It's pretty clean for an early '70s guitar. It was purchased as a guitar for videos, and some live work, and it'll probably get used with the new band. It'll sing all night, this one, especially through a high gain amp. A lot of people seem to think these guitars are just best for blues, but I reckon they're really versatile. Lots of bands use them, from Oasis to the Foo Fighters. It's the same with this early '70s red Gibson 335... it's got the ideal sound for this band, great for rhythm and leads. It's had years of endless use, but it's still in really good condition.

'One of our trademark sounds in Broken Soul Alliance is the way we treat the bass. We record two bass tracks with one slightly overdriven to give it more balls, and these Fenders are top of the list for the job. Our bassist Dave Draper uses my white '90s Jazz Bass live, and for the overdub he used my metallic blue 2001. I also have a Precision which I picked up on another outing to Denmark Street – Angel Music, in fact. The guy in there said he was selling me the heaviest Precision in the world! I laughed at the time, but it you play it for more than an hour without sitting down your back is certainly going to ache the next day. I really must find out what wood is used for the body... but the sustain is quite amazing.'

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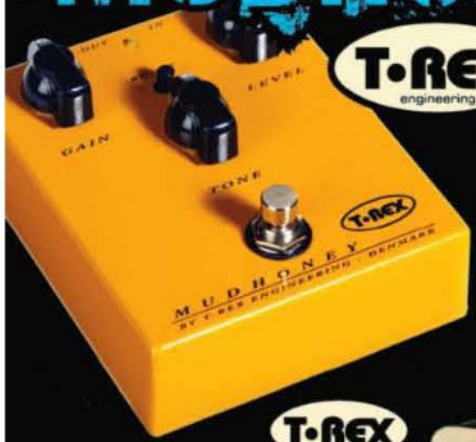

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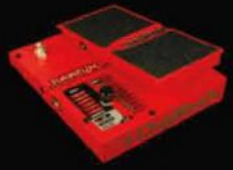

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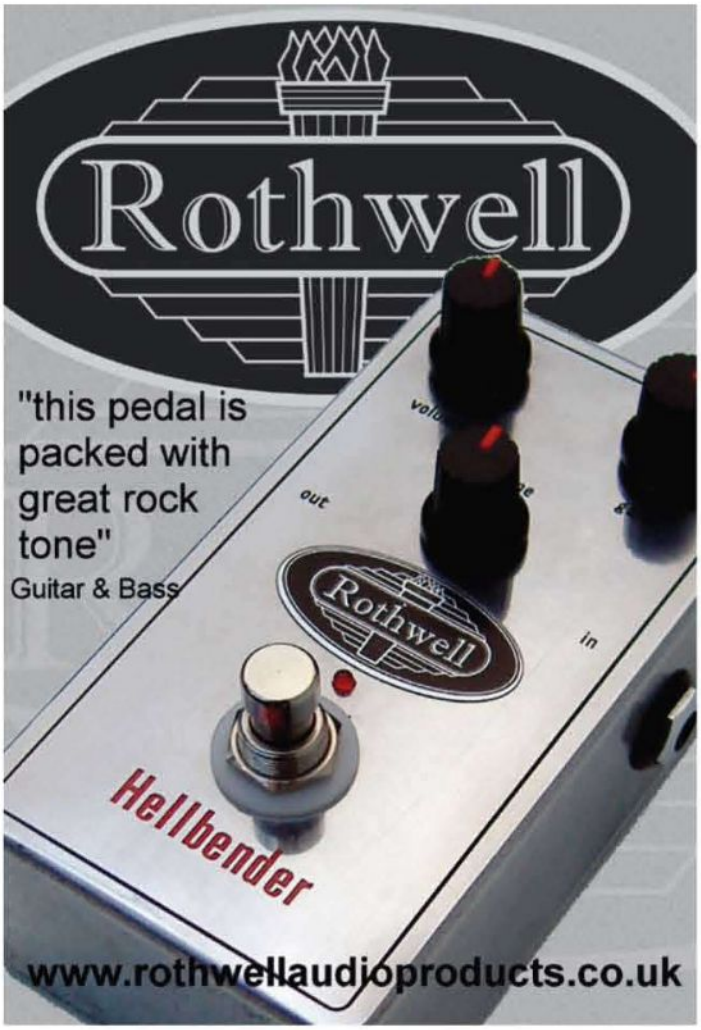

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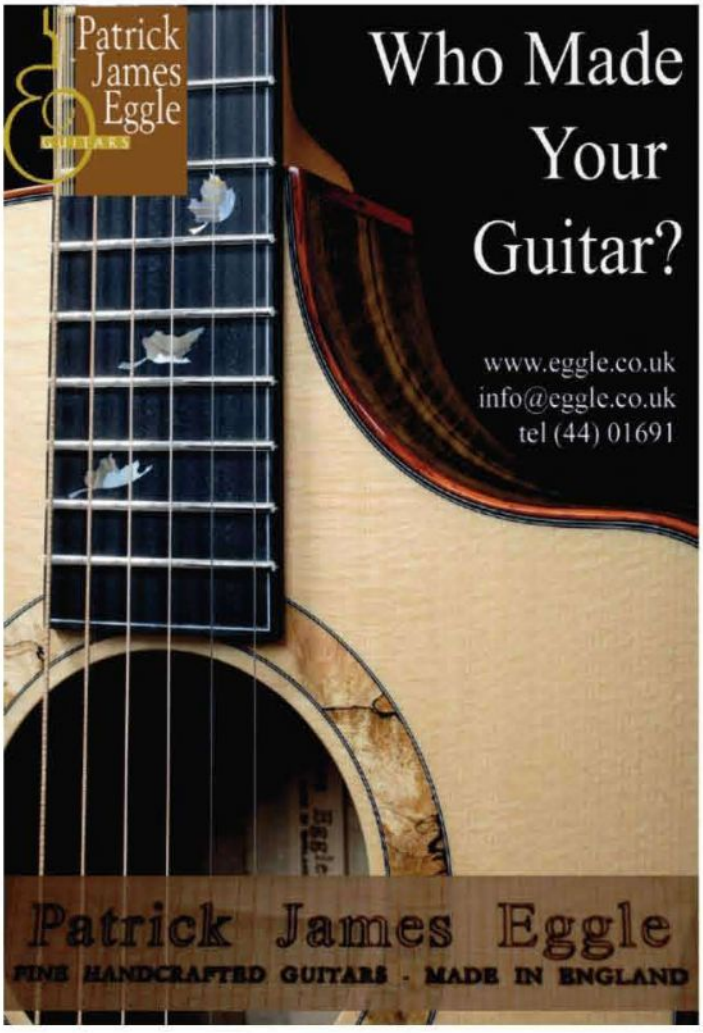

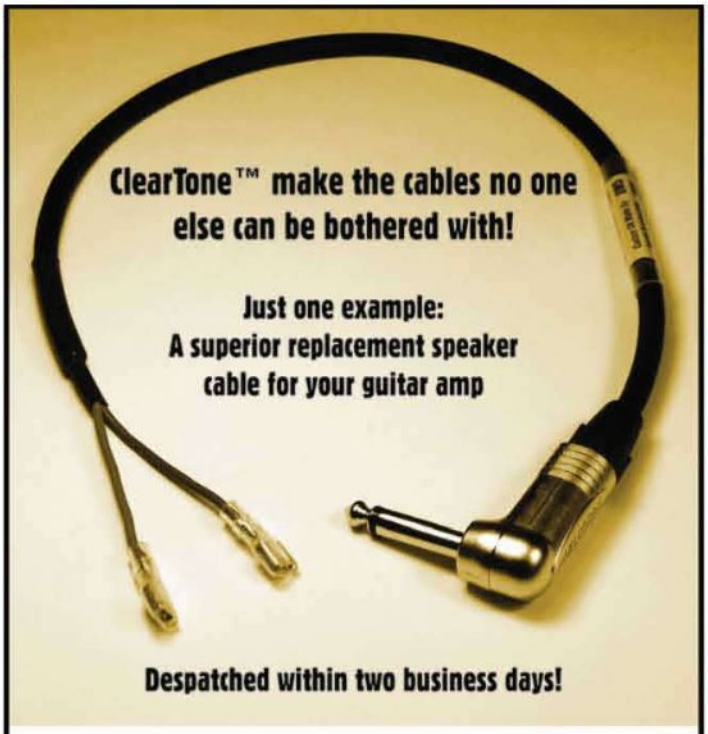

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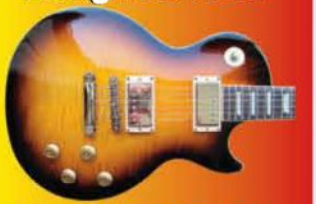
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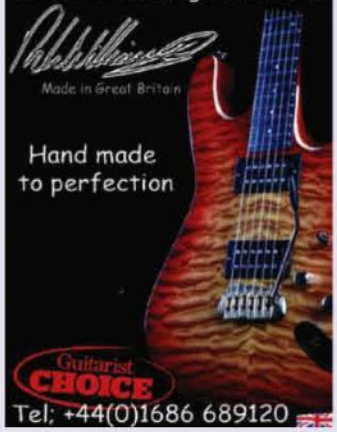
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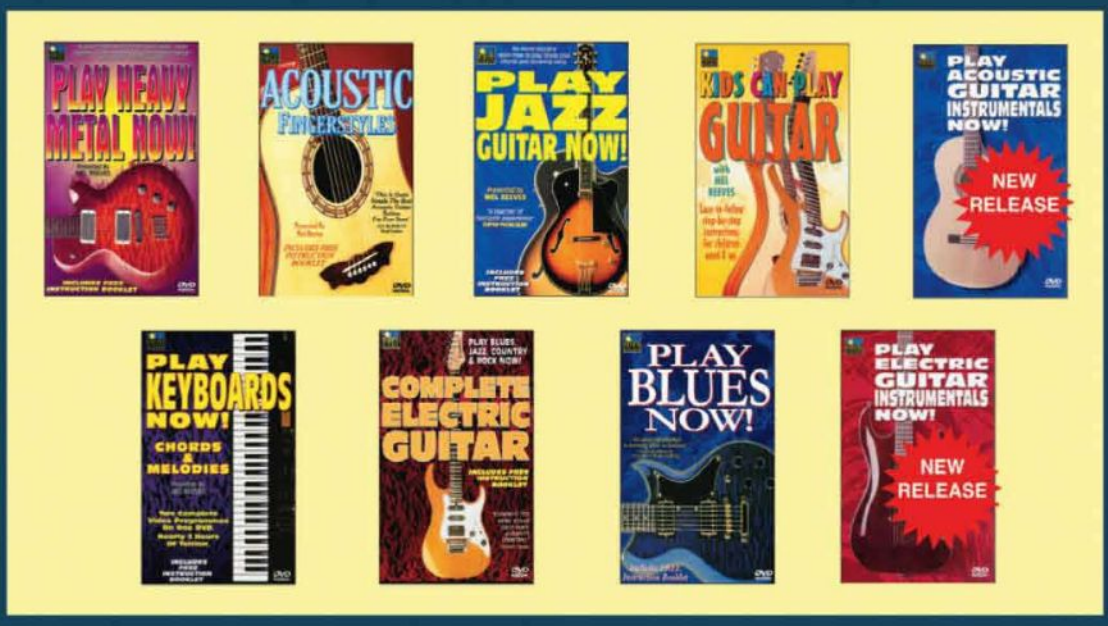

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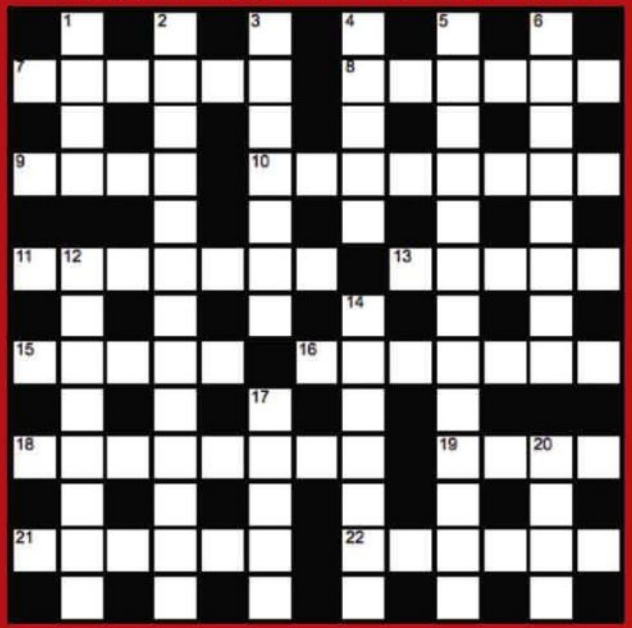

ACROSS

7. London luthier is like a cat? (6)
8. Black magic from Roger Mayer (6)
9. Nile Rodgers' smart band (4)
10. Ibanez pedal altered REM's race (8)
11. Bow to highest instrument that is not flat (7)
13. Neck rod may form rusts (5)
15. Indicating flowing insults (5)
16. Addictive sunburst (7)
18. Fender humbucking guitar has nothing in whirlwind (8)
19. Reportedly secure Scottish lake (4)
21. Replace electrics about cable (6)
22. Cigarette packet amp was one of The Miracles? (6)

DOWN

1. ___ Lover (PAF designer) (4)
2. No charm in chip using thumb to mute fundamental vibration (5,8)
3. Binge time in the studio (7)
4. A voracity conceals 70's Japanese brand (5)
5. Oil baron loath to make light weight transport (3-3,7)
6. Fir cones confused scientific investigation (8)
12. Chuck's command to Beethoven when no lottery winner (4,4)
14. Jackson's lone player (7)
17. Amplification found in Catalan eyries (5)
20. Country man ___ Atkins (4)

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Fender Custom Shop Closet Classic strat, fiesta red, 2008, 11-49 setup, lovely condition, all case candy, home use only, £1750 ovno email: s4wgb@hotmail.co.uk Tel: 07733 553330 (Oxford) no cheques [MW]

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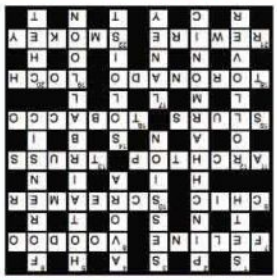

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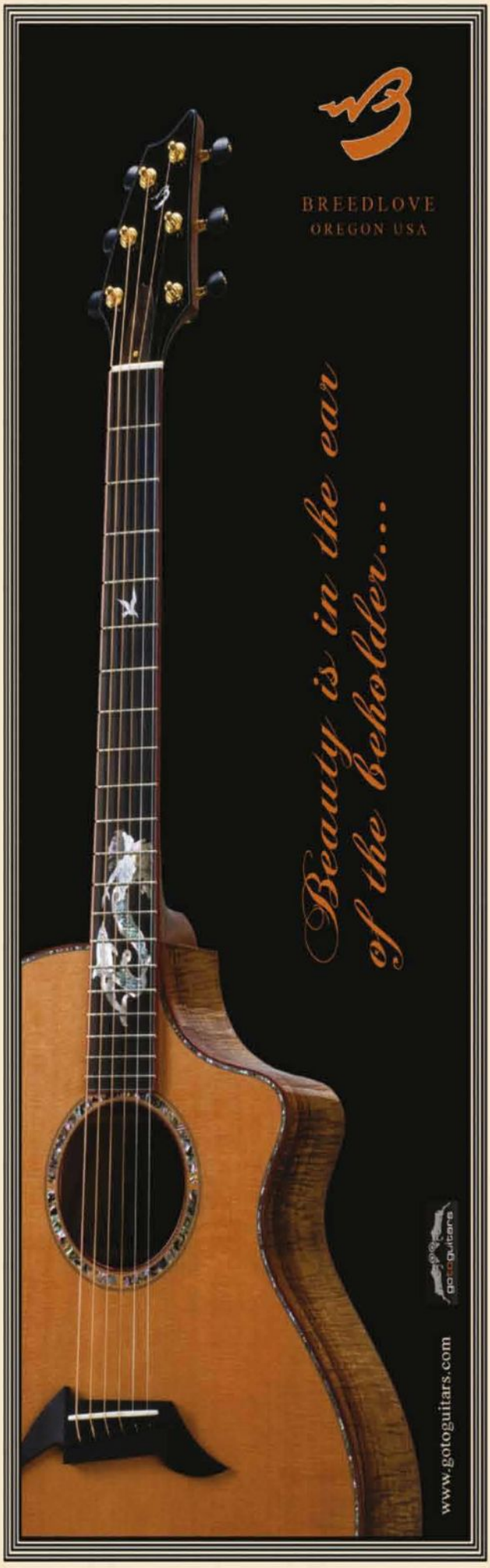

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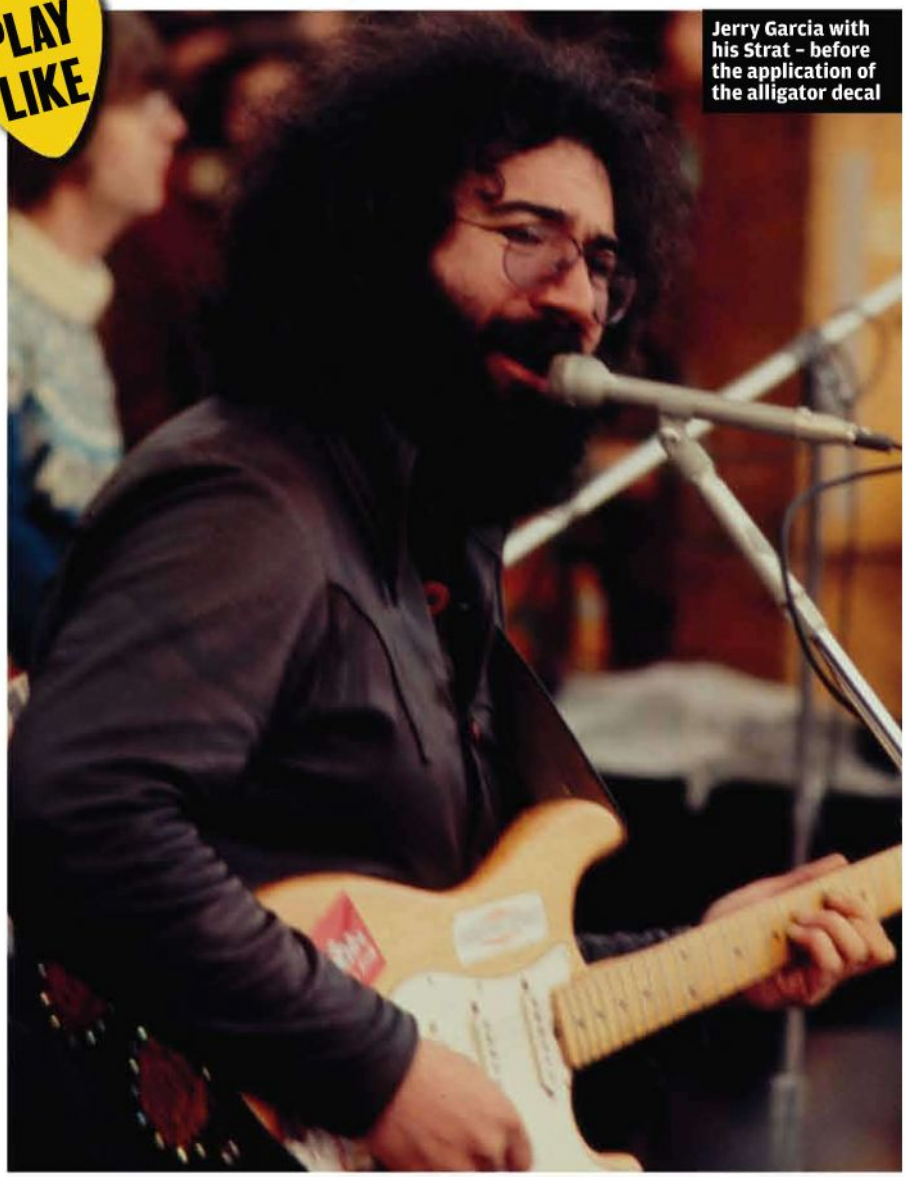


Jerry Garcia with his Strat – before the application of the alligator decal

Equipment

Around the start of the Grateful Dead's career Garcia played a Guild Starfire and a '56 Gibson Les Paul Custom, put mainly through Fender amplification. As their career progressed he used a wide range of instruments including Fender Stratocasters and Gibson SGs. One of his Strats, given to him by Graham Nash, was known as Alligator due to a sticker on the scratchplate. In the '80s Garcia played and endorsed Alvarez-Yairi acoustic guitars.

Later in his career, Garcia favoured three guitars all custom-built by Doug Irwin. First, in 1972, he took delivery of Wolf, a guitar which featured a marbled-like body and Strat-type electronics, but fitted with one single-coil pickup and two humbuckers.

In the late '70s further developments resulted in Tiger, a guitar with an ebony fretboard on a maple neck and named after a decorative mother-of-pearl inlay below the bridge. Again, this guitar used Strat-style electronics, but had one DiMarzio SDS-1 single-coil and two DiMarzio Super 2 humbuckers. 'When I picked up that guitar, I'd never felt anything that my hand likes better,' enthused Garcia.

In 1990 he started playing Rosebud, another Irwin model, this one featuring a decorative skeleton below the bridge. This guitar was a little lighter in weight than Tiger and had the controls in slightly different positions.

Cool country sounds, tight playing, fab songwriting: there's more to the Grateful Dead than acid and marathon jams. Douglas Noble goes tie-dye

Jerry Garcia

Guitar Techniques

The late Jerry Garcia, the spiritual leader of the Grateful Dead, was famed for his guitar expertise and extended improvisations – but he was actually a latecomer to the guitar. 'I didn't really start playing until the Grateful Dead started,' he explained. 'I put my first real energy into five-string banjo. It was like cracking a combination lock. I slowed the records down and painstakingly listened to every lick and worked them out. I did a complete breakdown – as close as I was able – to learn how to play bluegrass banjo. And, having gone through that process with banjo, when it came to electric guitar I knew how to learn it. So my taste in music is kind of informed by the banjo, too. I like to hear every note... I like that clarity and separation. That characterises my guitar playing too, in a certain way. So I came at it sort of backwards.'

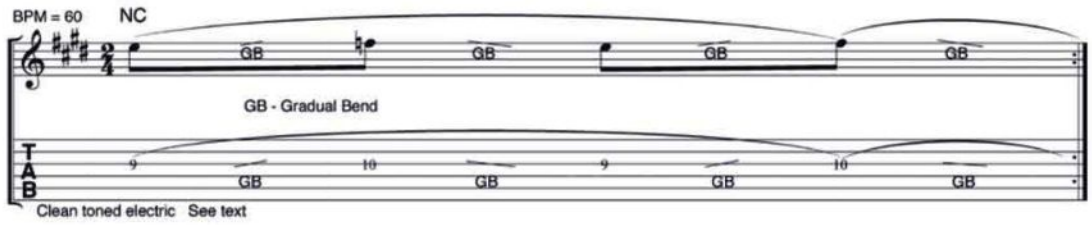
Garcia would periodically re-examine his playing technique, occasionally working on fretting hand fingering. 'A lot of it is just free playing, exploring for places where all of sudden something is vague or awkward, like suddenly finding yourself in a position that's odd in relation to the key you're playing in. Or, for example, suppose you're doing a run that's going down scale intervals, and you're on the top E string, and you're ending on one part of the passage on your first finger and then jumping a position and starting the next part with your little finger and moving down. That's difficult on the guitar.'

Garcia's physical approach to his left-hand fingering was unusual. 'Most players I've noticed seem to use a flat fingering. I've somehow trained myself to come straight down on top of the string. I play mostly on the tips of my fingers, so the high action doesn't get in my way at all. I'm not pulling other strings along with it and so forth.

'Generally I like to pick every note, but I do tend to pull-off, say, a real fast triplet on things that are closing up... intervals that are heading up the scale. I do it mostly without thinking about it. I almost never pull off just one note. I seldom hammer on, because it seems to have a certain inexactitude for me. I think that was a decision I made while playing the banjo. My preference is for the well-spoken tone, and I think coming down on the strings with high knuckles makes it.'

Exercise 1: Vibrato

2/4 Time



Garcia was big on vibrato. 'I have about four or five different families of it. Some are unsupported, with nothing touching the guitar but my finger on the string. Others are supported, and I just move the finger for the sound. Sometimes I use the wrist, other times my whole arm. I use horizontal and lateral motion for different sound and speed.

It depends on what I'm after and which finger I'm leading with. I tend to be style-conscious – I want a song to sound like the world it comes from.' Phew! Here's an exercise. Try using just the first finger with the thumb on the back of the neck. First use a movement parallel to the fret, pulling the string down towards the ground; release the bend, and repeat over and over. Second, while keeping the first finger stationary, 'pull' the string towards the nut, and release and repeat; this is a subtle classical guitar-style vibrato. Aim for a gradual, smooth and consistent effect. Practise different depths and different speeds, and listen to Garcia and try to imitate the effects he creates.

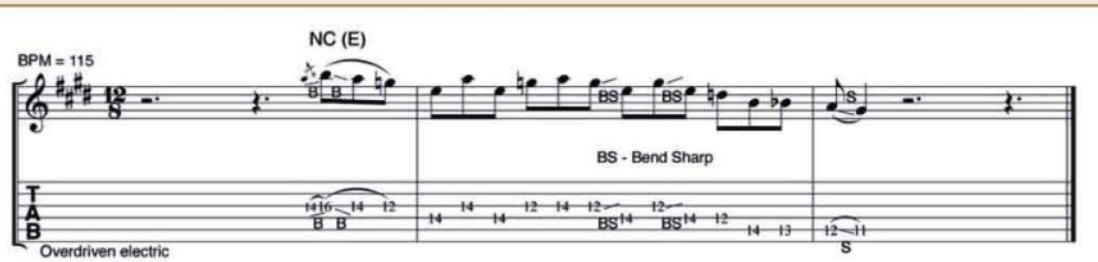
Exercise 2: Scales

4/4 Time

Two scales commonly used by Garcia were the pentatonic minor and the mixolydian mode. The first three bars show the E pentatonic minor scale; bars four to seven show the E mixolydian mode. For the E pentatonic minor scale, start with the first finger at the 12th fret, then finger it one-finger-per-fret; for the E mixolydian mode, start with the fourth finger at the 12th fret and finger one-finger-per-fret. The mixolydian mode can be thought of as the major scale with a flattened or minor seventh degree of the scale. The mixolydian mode is much used in folk and country music.

Exercise 3: Truckin' triplets

12/8 Time

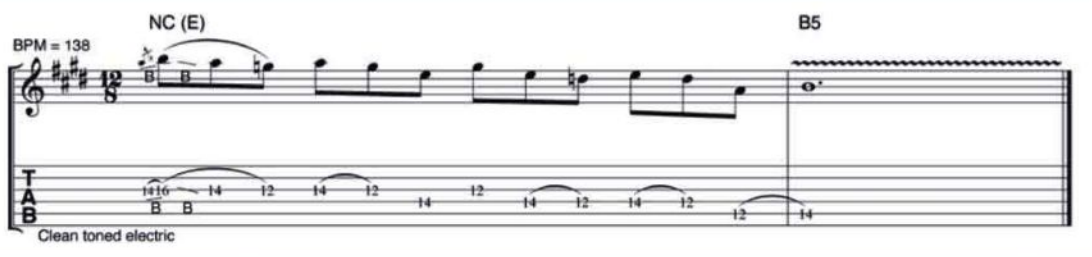


Garcia liked to use triplets in his lead work. This exercise is similar to a lick at the end of the intro solo of *Truckin'*, a shuffle in the key of E and based on chords I, IV and V giving it a distinctly bluesy feel.

The lick starts at 0:09 and is played over a basic tonality of an E chord. Garcia's notes all come from the E pentatonic minor scale (see Exercise 2) with the addition of the flattened fifth Bb note at the end of the second bar and the major third degree of the scale – the G# that ends the phrase. The last four notes are chromatic, moving down one fret at a time, giving a smooth feel to the end of the phrase.

Exercise 4: US Blues triplets

12/8 Time



Like *Truckin'*, *US Blues* is a shuffle rhythm based on chords I, IV and V with a bluesy feel, although it's in the key of A, modulating later to E. Towards the end of the song, at 4:21, Garcia makes use of triplets in his lead playing similar to the exercise. The notes are from the E pentatonic minor scale.

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Exercise 5: Syncopation between parts

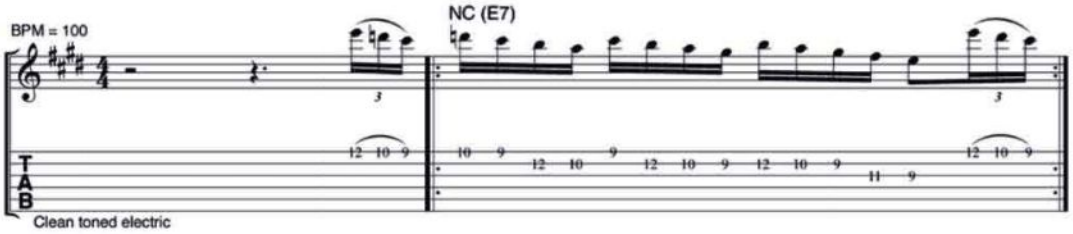
7/4 & 4/4 Time

'It's always been interesting to have little surprises – like, for instance, accenting all the off-beats for a bar,' Garcia said. 'There's also the constant playing in odd times with the Grateful Dead that contributes to that. For instance, if the band is playing in 7/4 time, I might play in 4/4. When you do that, you begin to notice certain ways in which the two rhythms synchronise over a long period of time.'

You're going to need a second guitarist or a means of recording yourself for this exercise. The riff is in 7/4, and the lead lick is in 4/4; the idea is to start them at the same time, and listen to the syncopated effects of the phrases being different numbers of beats long. For example, after the initial statement of the two bars, the lead lick will then start on the fifth beat of the riff. In fact, the first beat of the bar of each of the phrases will not coincide again until the first riff has been played five times, and the lead lick eight times. There's a suggested accent at the start of the riff and the lead phrase to make it easier to keep track of the 'one'. Feel free to incorporate variations, but keep the phrasing one bar long. We're using the E pentatonic minor scale from Ex 2.

Exercise 6: Syncopated phrasing

4/4 Time



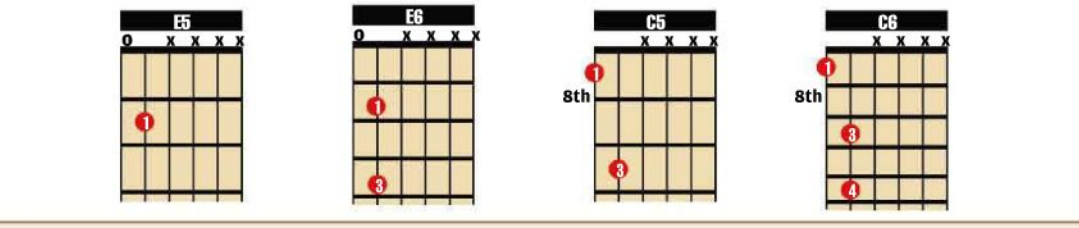
'For me it then becomes a thing of syncopations based on other syncopations,' Garcia continued. 'I like to start an idea when the music is in flow on a 16th note triple off of four.' This exercise is based on the E mixolydian mode and starts on the second half of the fourth beat with a 16th note triplet: for speed, Garcia would often slur such groupings with pull-offs. 'My little groups of pull-offs are really well articulated; it's something I worked on.'

Exercise 7: Fingering exercise

4/4 Time

Now we're going to look at overcoming a problem that Jerry Garcia came across when practicing. The first bar shows a descending one-octave E mixolydian mode, moving across the fretboard (feel free to go back to Exercise 2 to remind yourself of the E mixolydian mode). The fretting hand fingering is shown by the numbers between the music notation and the tablature. The second bar shows an alternative fingering of exactly the same notes, working down the fretboard. Garcia worked hard on phrases like this, trying to get a smooth transition when moving down the fretboard.

Exercise 8: 5 and 6 chords



Here are some boogie-tastic chord moves for use in Ex 9. A 5 chord is the root plus the fifth of the scale; a 6 chord consists of the root plus the sixth note of the scale. The voicings of E5 and E6 here use the open bottom string as the root note; the C5 and C6 voicings both contain fretted notes only.

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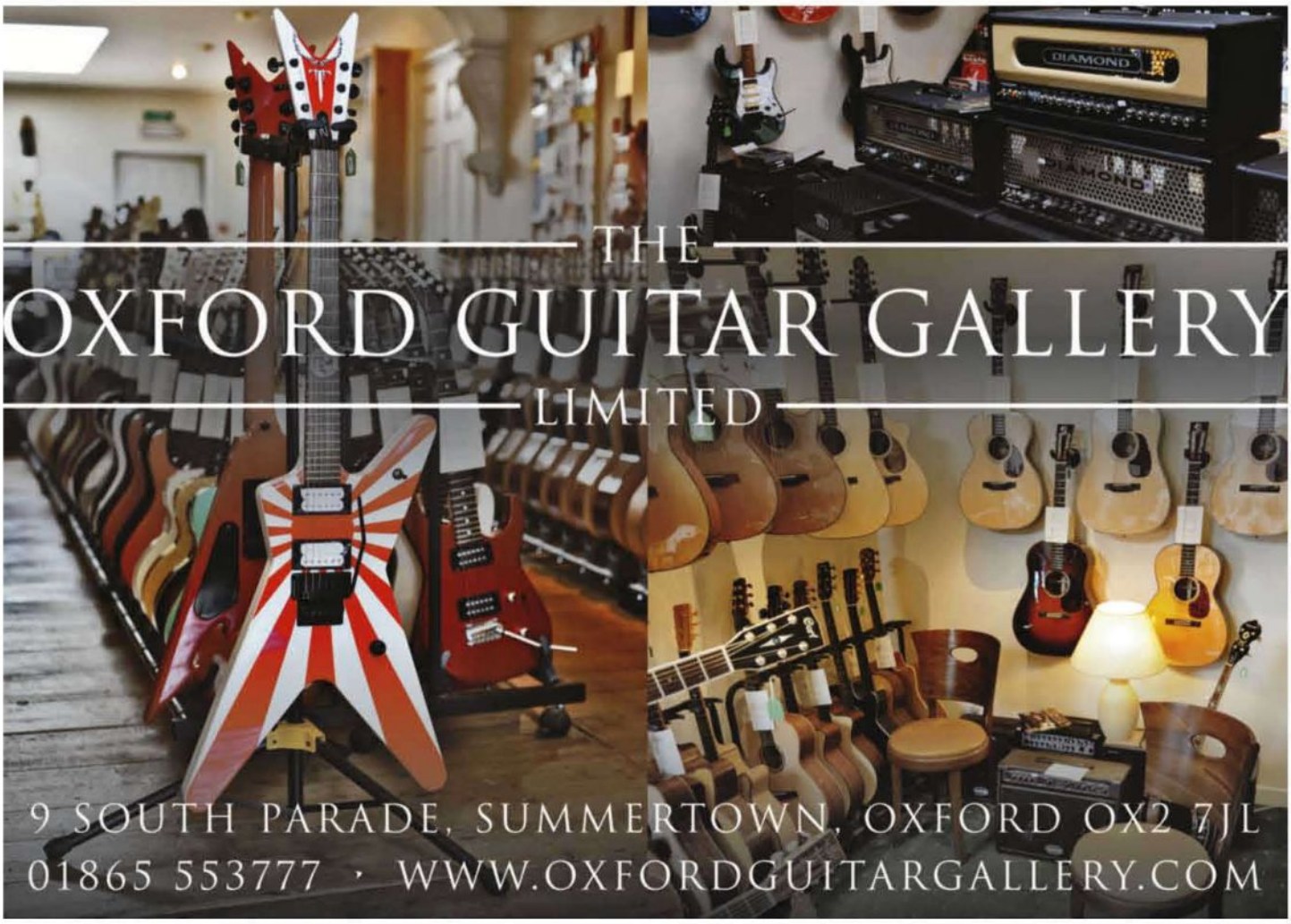
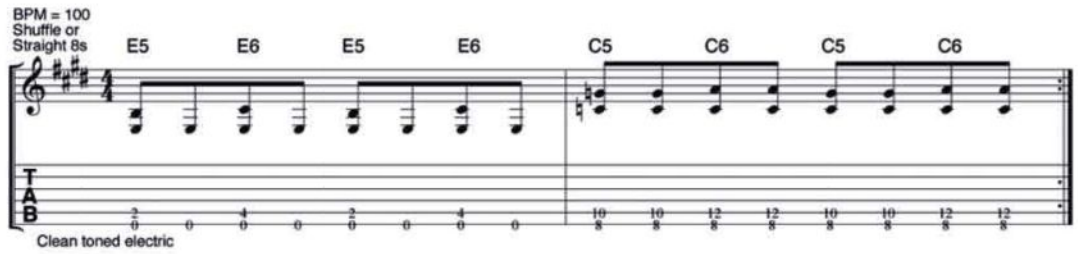


Exercise 9: Rhythm guitar riff

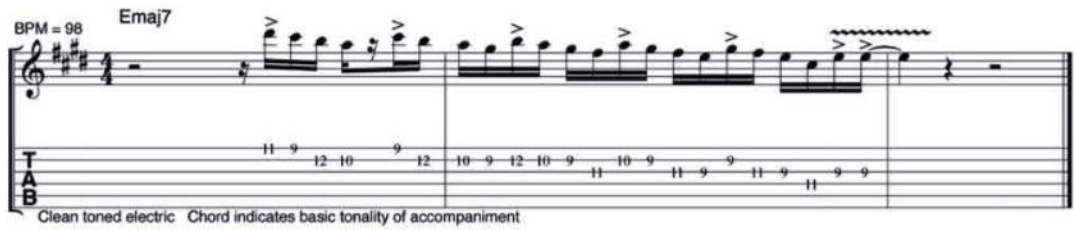
4/4 Time



This rhythm guitar riff can be played in both the shuffle rhythm and in 'straight eights'. The Grateful Dead use such rhythm guitar parts in the Garcia-co-penned songs *Truckin'*, *US Blues* and *Casey Jones*. This exercise shows a couple of ways these chords can be used in practice – in the first bar, the 5 and 6 bass notes are struck on the offbeat only, while in the second bar both notes are played simultaneously each time.

Exercise 10: Bluegrass-style runs

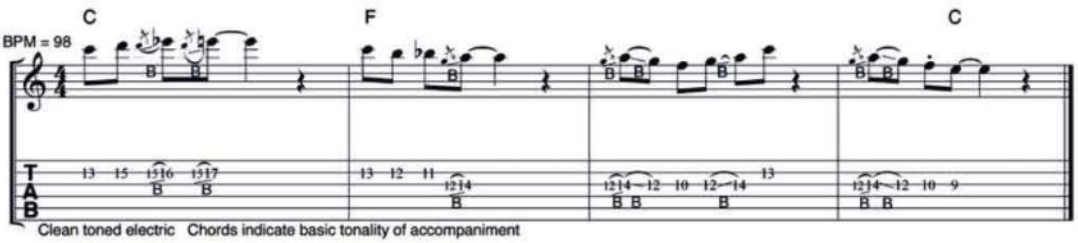
4/4 Time



The Dead may be known for psychedelia but they were steeped in the bluegrass and folk revival of the early '60s. Bluegrass often features long, continuous runs of notes, often in semiquavers and in patterns. Such a bluegrass-style run can be heard during the intro solo of *Eyes of The World* at 0:06, similar to the exercise. Notice the accents in the phrase on the top note of the pattern – Garcia often liked to use accents to add aid phrasing.

Exercise 11: Chromaticism

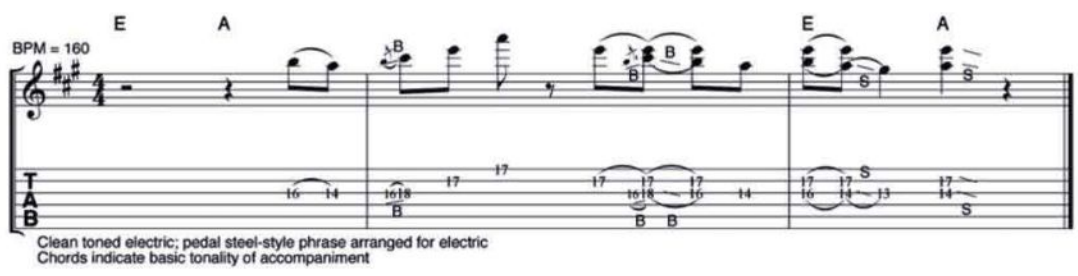
4/4 Time



Casey Jones is a song from the delightful 1970 album *Workingman's Dead*. The signature solo in *Casey Jones* at 2:16 uses chromaticism to link scale notes, giving a very smooth effect – something you can often hear in Jerry Garcia's distinctive soloing style. In the first bar, the chromatic passage uses the notes of D, Eb and E natural, with both the Eb and the E natural being approached via bends from D. Bar 2 also uses chromaticism: at the start of the bar, we've got a four-note chromatic descending passage of C, B, Bb and A, albeit with the A being approached by a bend from G.

Exercise 12: Pedal steel phrase arranged for guitar

4/4 Time



In *Sugar Magnolia* on *American Beauty*, Garcia plays pedal steel. Here we're exploring a part at the end of the solo, starting at 1:14, but arranged for clean toned electric guitar. Let the notes ring on for their notated value, as shown by the 'ties' – the curved lines linking two notes of the same pitch.

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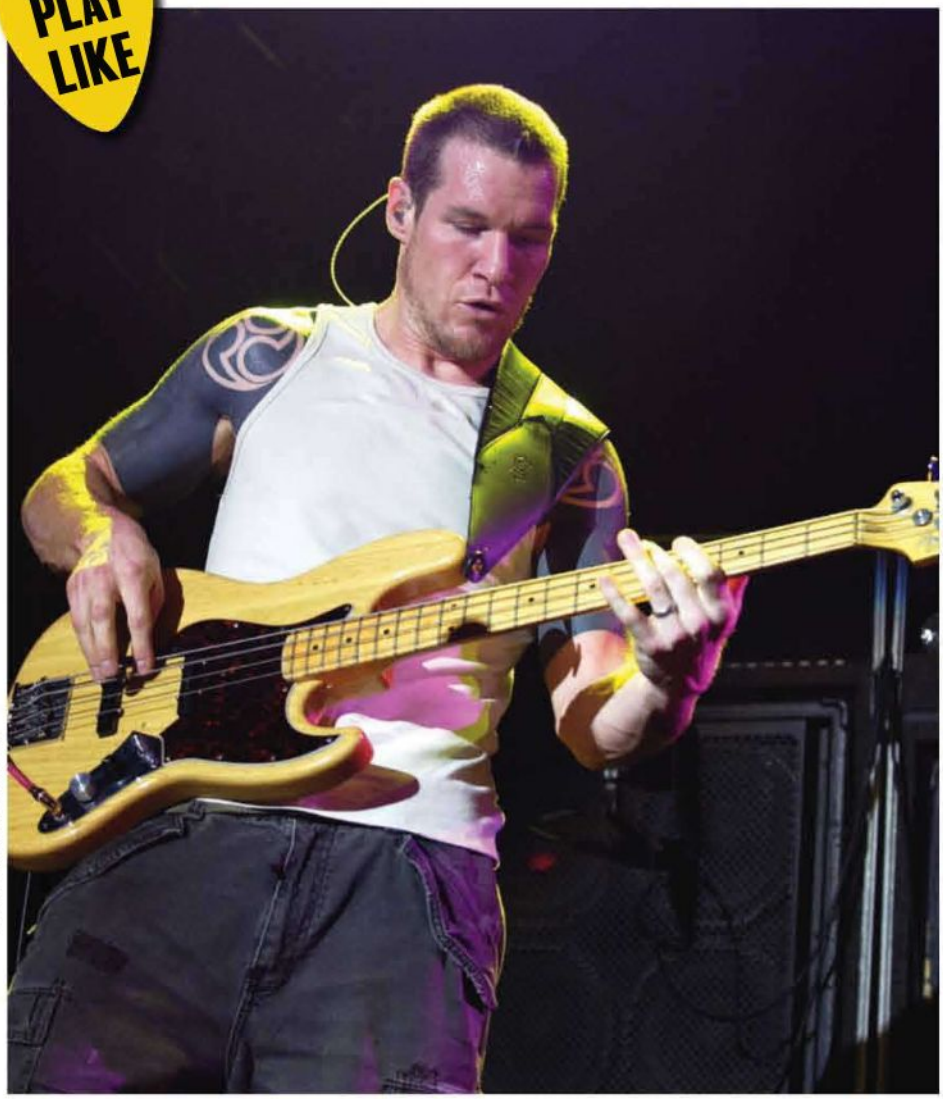


Photo: Angela Lubrano/Live Pix

Tim Commerford

Rage Against The Machine's bassist famously sabotaged MTV by climbing the scenery, but fans know him as a superbly exciting and melodic rock bassist. Gareth Morgan examines his finest early work

Bass Techniques

In December 2009, Jon and Tracy Morter from South Woodham Ferrers launched a campaign to end four years' domination of the Christmas #1 single slot by winners of ITV's *X Factor* – and by 20 December, *Killing In The Name* by Rage Against The Machine was in the top slot. It was a triumph for rock lovers everywhere... and a surprise for the band members, singer Zack de la Rocha, guitarist Tom Morello, drummer Brad Wilk and bassist Timothy Commerford.

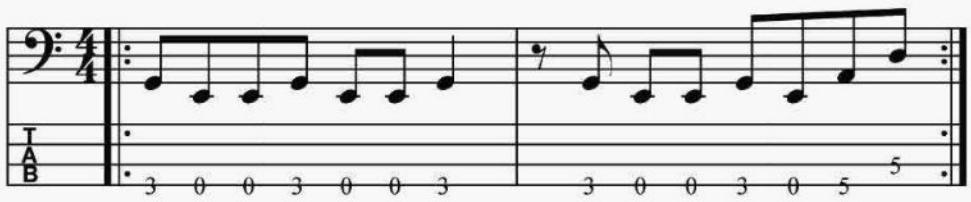
Born on February 26 1968 in Irvine, California, the son of an aerospace engineer, Commerford met Zack de la Rocha at school. RATM was formed in 1991 and in 1992 released a self-titled album, a thrilling blend of punk, hip-hop and thrash which went triple platinum, despite – or, if you prefer, because of – the band's fiercely political stance. The band's willingness to stand up for their beliefs led to numerous confrontations with the authorities, but they avoided being sidetracked, releasing three more studio albums up to 2000. In that year, however, Commerford was arrested for disrupting the MTV Video Music Awards, an incident alleged to be the impetus behind de la Rocha's departure in October.

The remaining trio of Commerford, Morello and Wilk, together with ex-Soundgarden singer Chris Cornell, formed Audioslave, releasing three hugely successful albums before Cornell quit in 2007. RATM reappeared later that year and, although no new material has emerged yet, the band have been gigging steadily and continue to regularly ruffle America's political feathers.

Commerford cites Jaco Pastorius and Hendrix's Band Of Gypsys as influences. Apart from occasional thumb work, he's a fingerstyle devotee, wielding a Musicman Stingray on RATM's first album, switching to Jazzes in 1995 before settling on a Lakland Joe Osborn in 2008. Whatever tone de la Rocha's diatribe requires, Commerford's happy to deliver. He and Morello often deal in dual riffing with tricky patterns, and he's always tight, solid and on the money. All our examples are drawn from the band's first album or the 1996 follow-up, *Evil Empire*.

Ex 1: I wanna be Jackie O

4/4 Time



Having a rapper instead of a conventional vocalist doesn't really seem to have had a radical effect on Commerford's bass approach. As there was no direct precedent for what RATM were doing, the fact that they sound like a tight, contemporary heavy rock band with a rapper is testament to the quality of the musicians involved. Besides, we're not talking rocket science; the songs are still arranged with verses and choruses. As you'll see, there's plenty of 16th-note action but Commerford's life-blood is still the humble eighth note, as demonstrated by our version of *Tire Me* (*Evil Empire*).

Ex 2: Silence can be violent

4/4 Time

When you get past RATM's full-on assault, you'll find plenty of other influences in play. There's plenty of dynamics within most of the tracks and de la Rocha isn't just a firebrand rap-preacher screaming warnings about society's imminent destruction. Songs with obvious hip-hop influences like *Fistful Of Steel* (*RATM*) provide Commerford with the opportunity to be a little bit more creative. Check out our version of his main bass part: you need to do the octave slides on the E string for tonal reasons, and the key to executing them cleanly is to look where you're going... literally.

Ex 3: Toxic metropolis

4/4 Time

One of Rage Against The Machine's most successful song formulas is for a funky, groove-oriented verse that kicks up a few gears into a hard-rocking chorus, giving a classic, natural dynamic lift. *People Of The Sun* (*Evil Empire*) is an excellent example of this in operation. The song is one of numerous de la Rocha lyrics concerning the plight of the indigenous people of Southern Mexico, and the flat-out fury of the chorus is contrasted nicely by Commerford's rolling, syncopated funk playing in the verse sections. That's what we've tried to get you close to here with our tribute above.

Ex 4: You say how high

4/4 Time

Because of RATM's massive profile in the '90s, Commerford's playing garnered many plaudits. It was in no way misplaced – the man can certainly play – and the highly creative elements that co-existed with the thrashier stuff makes his style highly appetising. *Bullet In The Head* (*RATM*) is one of his most imaginative, due in no small way to the verse section double stops. Check out our version, which you'll need to re-arrange slightly to get to the right feel. It's a good idea to hold the shape of the double-stop without actually fretting it while playing the root notes.

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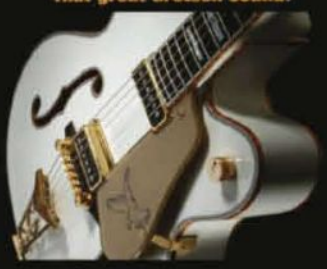

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Ex 5: Amp and amplify

4/4 Time

Rage Against The Machine's material is littered with Commerford/Morello unison riffs and many of these are high-octane, aggressive partnerships, often based on the pentatonic pattern or variations thereof. Occasionally, you can hear other influences in the phrasing or the general feel of the riff. Our example is based on the main bass part from *Know Your Enemy* (*RATM*) and while the pentatonic scale is the basis of the idea, you can't help but hear a little bit of Godfather Of Soul James Brown in the phrasing and choice of notes... if you ignore the distorted guitar, that is.

Ex 6: Ya gonna burn

4/4 Time

Bombtrack, the song that opens Rage Against The Machine's first album, is an excellent introduction to the band's hardcore material. Based on an old Tom Morello riff dismissed by an earlier band, it's made up of four unison riffs: a gentle intro that lulls you into a false sense of security, a solid verse riff and then a slightly more expansive figure that ushers in and underpins Morello's guitar solo. Our example is based on the extrovert chorus bass part which you can either play with your fingers or using slap technique. To do the latter, hit the notes on the A and D strings with your thumb and pop the G string.

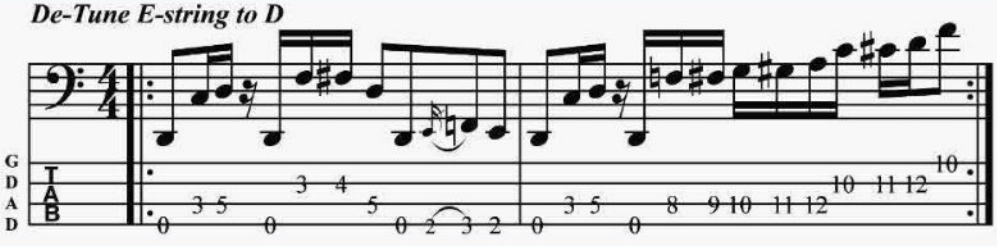
Ex 7: Capital eclipse

4/4 & 5/4 Time

The *Evil Empire* album is, musically, slightly less frenetic and confrontational. The parts are funkier, Morello's approach is more based around sound effects and less a wall of distorted noise, while the Commerford/Wilk rhythm section is a good deal more laid back. There's still a bunch of quality riffs shared by bass and guitar, however, and one of the more memorable ones is the intro/chorus from *Wind Below*. Check out our close approximation: it's not just a pentatonic thrash-up, and the extra beat in bar two (denoted by '5/4') makes it just that fraction more difficult.

Ex 8: Now you do what they told ya

4/4 Time



For our last example we're looking at Commerford's verse part from the infamous *Killing In The Name*, released on cassette in 1991, as a single and on the first LP in '92 and then achieving download fame in the Cowell-bashing incident of 2009. First of all, as indicated in the example itself, you'll need to tune your E string down to D – a move commonly referred to as 'drop D tuning'. There are a couple of reasons for this, including access to the low D for a deeper, more powerful root note and also because it makes both the whole part and the fill in bar two a lot easier to achieve than they otherwise would be.

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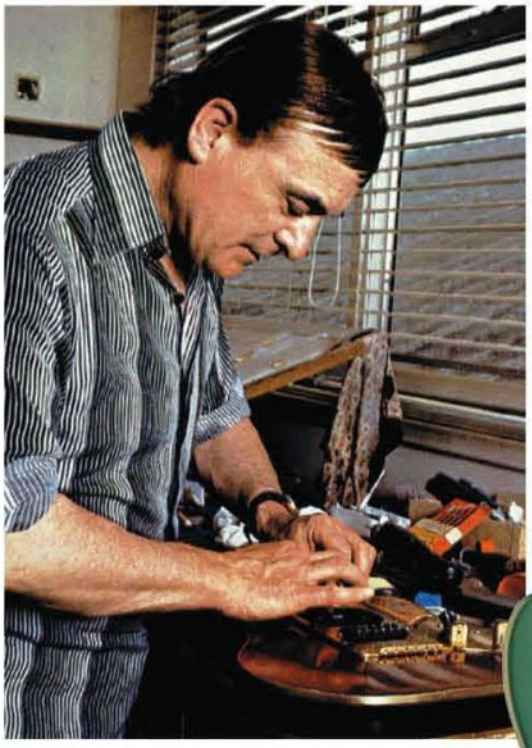

Centre, the wayward but brilliant Jim Burns. Left, the Jazz Bass

1960

JFK becomes president, Elvis returns from military service, the US approves the world's first contraceptive pill, Eisenhower puts the Civil Rights Act through and Harold Macmillan makes his famous 'Wind Of Change' speech: the advent of the 'swinging '60s' was very much a time of transition, and no more so than in the world of guitars. The Beatles packed their bags for Hamburg where they would hone their skills and adopt their soon-to-become-trademark Rickenbackers; Fender followed their revolutionary Precision bass with the introduction of the Jazz; and Jim Burns, the 'British Leo Fender', began forging his dream of the 'ideal' electric guitar.

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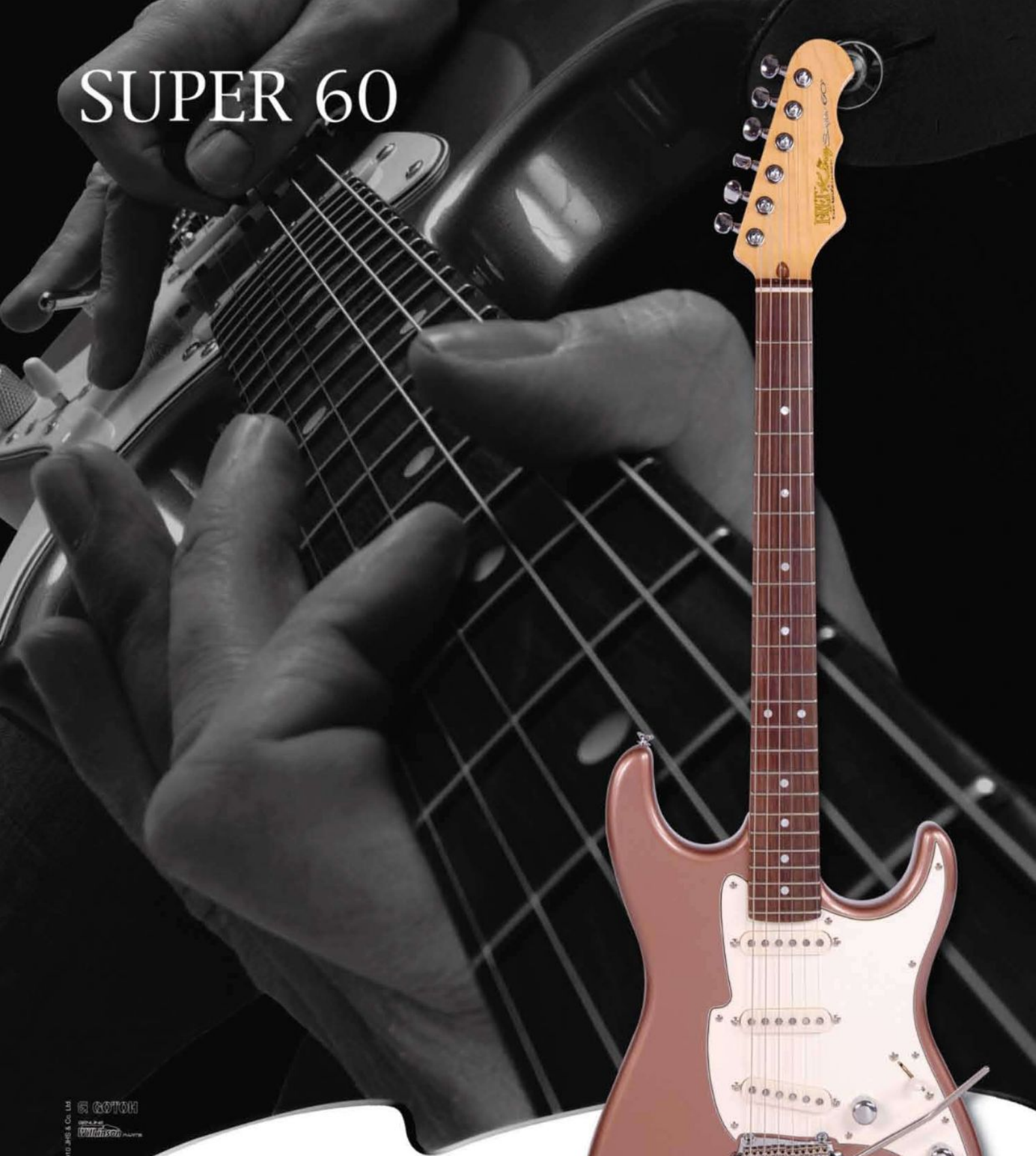

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